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THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW

“A FESTA DA VIDA”
DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS FROM THE
WCC 9TH ASSEMBLY IN PORTO ALEGRE

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Contents

1	Editorial	112	Called to be the One Church <i>Ecclesiology text</i>
6	Opening sermon <i>Anastasios of Albania</i>	118	Church Unity - Claiming a Common Future An Orthodox Voice <i>Jacob Kurien</i>
14	Closing sermon <i>Robina Marie Winbush</i>	121	Church Unity - Claiming a Common Future A Protestant Voice <i>Isabel Apawo Phiri</i>
20	Message of the 9th Assembly of the WCC	124	Church Unity - Claiming a Common Future Reflecting together <i>Jorge A. Scampini, OP</i>
22	What can we learn from the Mu- tirão? <i>Simon Oxley</i>	127	Church Unity - Claiming a Common Future An evangelical contribution <i>Norberto Saracco</i>
28	Celebrating Life – a festa da vida <i>Samuel Kobia</i>	130	Desire for a Common Future <i>Lei Garcia and John Ngige Njoroge</i>
48	Report of the Moderator <i>Catholicos Aram I</i>	134	God in Your Grace, Transform our Churches <i>Namsoon Kang</i>
69	Christian Identity and Religious Plurality <i>Rowan Williams</i>	140	God in Your Grace, Transform our Lives <i>Sarah Newland-Martin</i>
76	Living a Culture of Peace <i>A Letter from the US Conference</i>	144	Grace for Grace, Testimony of a pastor 's daughter <i>Gracia Violeta Ross</i>
78	A response from the WCC General Secretary to the US churches	153	God in Your Grace, Transform our Societies <i>Paula Devejian</i>
82	AGAPE - A call to love and action	157	Ecumenical Chronicle
87	The Signs of the Times <i>Wolfgang Huber</i>	157	Report of the Public Issues Committee
90	The Island of Hope <i>Terauango Beneteri</i>	188	Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee
92	Empire and Religion <i>Nancy Cardoso Pereira</i>	197	Report of the Policy Reference Committee
99	Post-Soviet Countries <i>Vsevolod Chaplin</i>	209	Book reviews
102	The Economy of Communion Project <i>Vera Araújo</i>		
105	Message from the ILO Director- General <i>Juan Somavia</i>		
108	Wealth and Poverty: Challenge to Churches <i>Yash Tandon</i>		

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THE QUARTERLY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Editor
Samuel KOBIA

Managing Editor
Theodore A. GILL, Jr

Book Review Editor
Simon OXLEY

Editorial

The “official report” of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches will be published by the end of 2006, under the editorship of Professor Luis Rivera-Pagan of Princeton Theological Seminary. For the first time since the inaugural WCC assembly at Amsterdam in 1948, the printed volume will be augmented by a computer disc, or CD-ROM, reproducing in an electronic format almost every text available to the publishers. A few extemporaneous presentations, and some resources such as hymns that are under copyright, will be absent even from the CD – leaving room to posterity for speculation, creative interpretation and mystery. (Authors of graduate theses should be grateful.) The assembly edition of *Ecumenical Review*, a tradition running parallel to that of official reports, offers a foretaste of the delights to come.

Although one or more features on the CD-ROM may include audio and video presenta-

tions, computer technology is not sufficiently advanced to communicate adequately the atmosphere and culture of Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006. That was the month when 3,000 participants congregated at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul for both a business meeting of the WCC’s highest governing body and a festival of the ecumenical movement.

As is well known to regular readers of this journal, the theme for the Ninth Assembly was “God, in your grace, transform the world”. This intercession was echoed in many ways by assembly participants. Archbishop Anastasios examined the theme theologically in the course of his opening sermon. Sub-themes were explored daily: “transform the earth,” “transform our societies,” “transform our lives,” “transform our churches,” “transform our witness.” The Assembly Message to the churches and the world, adopted on the final day, was built on

the foundation provided by the assembly's theme. And the closing sermon, by the Rev. Robina Winbush, suggested ways in which God may already be answering our prayer.

Many preparatory materials and introductory presentations in Brazil set the stage for the gathering. The convening of the assembly proper on 14 February was preceded by four related, pre-assembly conferences of Christian women, youth, Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. It was frequent noted that, of the nine WCC assemblies convened over 58 years, this was the first to take place in Latin America. It was the first assembly since September 11, 2001 and the declaration of an official "war on terror". This also made it the first assembly since the US administration carried out its doctrine of preemptive war in the invasion of Iraq, despite the opposition of many church leaders and other concerned world citizens.

From an internal perspective, Porto Alegre was significant in being the first assembly since the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. The language of "ecumenical worship" had been succeeded by "common prayer", new patterns of Council "membership" had been suggested for churches of differing sizes and circumstances, and a set of consensus-based methods for decision-making were being proposed as amendments to the WCC's Constitution and Rules. For a variety of reasons, then, expectations were high for decisions and actions that might emerge from the Ninth Assembly.

Beyond the paper trail

It was high summer in the southern hemisphere, and the eve of Brazil's legendary celebration of Carnival. In his report to the assembly, WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia linked the seasonal excitement to the spirit of the assembly as he invited delegates, visitors and well-wishers to join in "*a festa da vida*", the festival of life. This was the spirit sought through business sessions in the plenary hall and during committee meetings, yet it was more likely to be found in less formal moments of Bible study, ecumenical conversation, workshops and discussions bearing the Portuguese titles *mutirão* and *bate-papo*, artistic performances, demonstrations, communal meals and common prayer.

As has been the case in recent decades, morning and evening prayer took place at the start and close of each day under the canvas folds of an expansive tent. However, in Porto Alegre the customary white tents of Harare, Canberra and Vancouver were succeeded by what was clearly a circus tent. The devotional dimension of *a festa da vida* transpired beneath a dizzyingly multi-coloured canopy. It is tempting to extend the metaphor and portray the *festa da vida* in Porto Alegre as a circus with many rings. To use an image from higher culture, conditions have evolved over the decades in such a way that assemblies are works executed in mixed media.

The purpose, attitude and administrative methods characterizing WCC assemblies have changed since 1948. Once, parliamentary-style deliberations were central and constituted the common understanding of

what happened at an assembly. Around the periphery of the meetings, one found interpretive exhibits, speakers, book stalls, music and theater, study groups.

In 1968, during the era of the “teach-in” in western universities, attention shifted from the business meeting to special events. At the WCC’s fourth assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, the spotlight shone most brightly on speeches by invited guests, coffeehouses, folk songs and youth protests. By 1983 and the sixth assembly in Vancouver, the concept of enthusiastic, multi-cultural “ecumenical worship” – as exemplified in the Lima Liturgy – helped further redefine the WCC assembly. By this time, the principal business of delegates was to elect a WCC central committee to serve until the next assembly – and many key decisions once made during the assembly were now referred to the central committee.

At Harare, the eighth assembly was presented largely as a “marketplace of ideas” – a “*padare*”, the Shona term for market square. Thousands of facilitators from churches and affiliated organizations made their way to Zimbabwe to participate in workshops promoted under this rubric. The *Padare* had something of the air of *Kirchentag*, the German national church festival that has become a social and spiritual movement in its own right. The organizers of Porto Alegre translated *Padare* into Portuguese and offered a range of seminars under the heading “*mutirão*”. In addition, much of the agenda of the assembly was given over to Bible studies and “ecumenical conversations” in dozens of small groups

In Porto Alegre, while the delegates representing member churches elected a central committee and pointed programmatic directions for approximately seven years until the next assembly, observers and visitors and activists engaged in the ecumenical festival that surrounded the business sessions, engaged the official delegates and WCC staff, and were as much “the assembly” as any exchange or decision recorded in minutes of the committee or plenary meetings.

Following nomination and election of WCC presidents and a central committee, membership in the new central committee numbered 150. The eight WCC presidents were:

- Simon Dossou, Methodist Church in Benin (Africa)
- Soritua Nababan, Protestant Christian Batak Church (Asia)
- Ofelia Ortega, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba (Caribbean-Latin America)
- Mary Tanner, Church of England (Europe)
- Bernice Powell Jackson, United Church of Christ (North America)
- John Taroanui Doom, Maohi Protestant Church (Pacific)
- Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania (Eastern Orthodox)
- His Holiness Abune Paulos, Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Oriental Orthodox)

A change in operating procedure

In the business sessions themselves, a highly significant shift in procedure was adopted this year. One of the hallmarks of the Porto

Alegre assembly came in a constitutional change to the way in which business is transacted. A series of amendments, responding to the 2002 recommendations of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, instituted a process of consensus decision-making in place of the former parliamentary rules of procedure which had served since the inception of the Council. The new process of common discernment and consensus will be applied not only to meetings of the assembly but to the central committee and its principal sub-committees as well. Details of this approach, with a link to the new rules, may be found on the Internet at the assembly's web site:

<http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/other-topics/consensus-decision-making.html>

Questions remained in the minds of many after the experience of consensus decision-making at the assembly. While the technique aims to avoid a culture of "winning" and "losing" on any given issue, some worried that it will be more difficult in future for the Council to take uncompromising positions on controversial issues. Others argued the consensus procedure will serve as a corrective, keeping the Council from taking hasty decisions. The failure of church representatives to come to a working agreement on matters of economic globalization, for example, may act as a spur to deeper study of these problems and advance a clearer understanding among churches.

Given limitations of time and the challenge of coming to consensus, it was clear that the

task of an assembly is now to point general directions for the Council. Detailed planning for the WCC's future was, as expected, left to the central committee, its executive committee and the general secretariat. These leaders of the Council were instructed to prepare a plan under which the organization will attempt to "do less, but do it well" over the seven years until the Tenth Assembly. It was not clear during the assembly the extent to which this mandate will require restructuring – a possibility to be revisited by the central committee in early September 2006. Four areas of programming priorities were recommended by the Ninth Assembly: (1) unity, spirituality and mission, (2) ecumenical education, especially among youth, (3) global justice and (4) bringing a credible, moral voice to the world. The assembly also directed that a new youth advisory body be established and empowered to provide support and offer suggestions to WCC leadership in the years ahead.

The central committee met briefly before departing from the assembly site, electing an executive committee and moderator Walter Altmann, president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil; the vice-moderators are Margaretha Henriks-Ririmasse, dean of the theological faculty of the Indonesian Christian University, and Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Highlights of the assembly

This edition of *ER* is a mere sampler, drawn from texts that are slated to appear in the

full report of the assembly. We begin by framing the event through a presentation of the opening and closing sermons, the assembly's "Message" in the form of an invitation to prayer, and a report on the experience of diversity in the phenomenon of *mutirão* at Porto Alegre.

The reports of the general secretary, Samuel Kobia, and the outgoing moderator, His Holiness Aram I, provide institutional background from two pillars of the Council. Dr Kobia gives his first assembly report as general secretary, while Catholicos Aram speaks from fifteen years' experience as moderator of the central committee after having first been elected at the Seventh Assembly in Canberra.

The other articles touch on major topics that were discussed at the Ninth Assembly.

The archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, spoke to the assembly on the pressing need for progress in inter-religious relations and co-operation.

The WCC's conference of member churches in the United States sent its own message to the assembly, an anguished confession of complicity in national sinfulness on many fronts. The assembly charged the general secretary to respond pastorally to this cry. Both documents are responses to the state of the world in early 2006, and both are reprinted here.

Globalization was the focus of a series of plenary presentations in Porto Alegre. The "AGAPE Call" was the basis for discussion,

and it is published here with economic analyses offered by Wolfgang Huber, Nancy Cardoso, Vsevolod Chaplin, Vera Araujo, Juan Somavia, Yash Tandon and Terauango Beneteri.

Unlike their predecessors at Harare, the delegates of Porto Alegre adopted a text on full and visible unity to be forwarded to the churches for their response, following the pattern of the *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (BEM) convergence document and the churches' subsequent responses. The "ecclesiology text" is titled *Called to be the One Church*, and it is found in these pages along with comments made at the assembly by Jacob Kurien, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Jorge Scampini and Norberto Saracco.

The remaining articles reflect on aspects of the assembly theme and sub-themes, on our hope for the transformation of this world through God's grace. Voices rise in harmony from a diversity of regions and traditions: Lei Garcia and John Ngige Njoroge, Sarah Newland-Martin, Gracia Violeta-Ross, Paula Devejian and Namsoon Kang.

Finally, at the close of this double issue, just prior to the book reviews, the "Ecumenical Chronicle" section provides the full text of the three committee reports on which the Ninth Assembly took definitive action in the areas of public issues, programme guidelines and policy reference.

THEODORE A. GILL, Jr.

Managing Editor

OPENING SERMON

Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania is head of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania and professor emeritus of the National University of Athens. This sermon was preached at the common prayer which opened the WCC 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre.

I The Triune God's transformative interventions

1: The formulation of our Assembly theme assumes the form of a prayerful petition, if you like, it is a mystical cry, which reveals a sense of profound weakness and intense expectation. It is a contemporary variation of the prayer placed on our lips by Christ himself: "... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." It is based on the recognition that, for the transformation of the world, our human thoughts, ideas and abilities are insufficient. Yet, at the same time, it is founded on the conviction that the God, in whom we hope, is not indifferent to human history. God is immediately interested and is able, through his grace, wisdom and power, to intervene and transform the entire universe. God takes the initiative, taking action and assuming the decisive role in universal events.

The faith and experience of the Church with regard to the mystery of God are summed up in the phrase: "The Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit" creates, provides, and saves. God is incomprehensible and inaccessible in his essence. Nevertheless, his presence is perceived in the world through his grace and the manifestation of his glory. Such is the dynamic, creative and transforming energy of the Trinity that is beyond all essence. Grace is the unique gift, which contains all other gifts. It is revealed in all the divine energies. Eastern Christian thought clearly distinguishes between the created universe and the uncreated energies of God. The super-essential God is not identified with any created understanding or idea, like the philosophical concept of essence. That which in the final analysis humankind is able to assume is the grace of God.

2. The most surprising transformative intervention occurred in human history when the Word of God was incarnated and assumed human nature – not only human spirit but also matter and, thereby, all of creation, since humanity is its crown. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). All the stages of Christ's life comprise expressions of divine grace as well as of divine glory. During His Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, Jesus revealed

the original beauty of humanity created “in the image” of God as well as the concluding splendid glory of humanity “in the likeness” of God.

The sacrifice on the cross and the resurrection of Christ complete the salvation of the human race by divine grace. “But God, who is rich in mercy ... raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4,6-7). Amazed before this astonishing gift, St. Paul professes: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8-9). Since that time, what took place ontologically within human nature in the person of Jesus Christ continues with the ongoing presence and energy of the Holy Spirit.

The closing pages of the New Testament illumine the eschatological vision of the Church, describing a universal transformation, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). The One seated on a throne proclaims: “Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev. 21:5)

As to what form the transformation of the world will ultimately assume in the future remains a secret of the God of surprises. After all, this is what happened in the past. If human creativity – this divine gift, which we have received – has reserved so many surprises for us, the grace of God holds incomparably more and entirely superb surprises.

The word “grace” was employed by the Septagint in the Greek translation of the old testament for the rendering of diverse Hebrew terms. In Greek, the original language of the new testament, grace “denotes firstly the radiant attraction of beauty, secondly the inner radiance of goodness, and finally the gifts which bear witness to this generosity.”¹

As the energy of the Trinitarian God (Acts 13:43, 14:26; Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 1:4, 3:10, 15:10; 2 Cor. 6:1, 8:1, 9:14; Eph. 3:2, 7:7; etc), grace is referred to in the new testament sometimes as “the grace of God”, other times as “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and at other times as “the grace of the Holy Spirit.” In the conscience of the united Church, grace is the energy of the entire Holy Trinity. As St. Athanasius the Great emphasises: “Grace is singular, deriving from the Father, proceeding through the Son and fulfilled in the Holy Spirit.”² And elsewhere, he writes: “They have this grace with the participation of the Word, through the Spirit and from the Father.”³

¹ Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique, publié sous la direction de Léon Dufour et alia, 3ème ed. Cerf, Paris 1974,1.

² Epist. ad Serapion, 1:14, PG 26.565B.

³ Orationes tres adversus Arianos, PG 25.29A.

II We are co-workers in the transforming energy of divine grace

In our petition "God, in your grace, transform the world," the immediate response that we receive is: But I want you to be with me! Your place is not to be spectators of divine interventions and actions, but co-workers. This is a direct consequence of my incarnation, of the constitution of the church, of my "mystical body," where you have freely accepted to become members. All of us, then, who belong to him have both the privilege and the obligation to share actively in the transformation of the world.

1. Beginning with ourselves. The life in Christ, to which we have been called, is a continuously transformative journey. St. Paul advises: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:2) "Renewing the mind" is precisely what repentance is about. And it may come through contemplative silence, which leads to the awareness of our nothingness and worthlessness. It is the result of self-criticism regarding the degree of our estrangement from the ideal determined by his will.

What is demanded is a continual gaze upon and search for God. It is not a matter of change once-for-all but of an ongoing transformation by the grace of the Spirit. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, ... and all of us ... seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Cor. 2:17-18) We are speaking of a transformative process, from purification to purification, from repentance to repentance, from virtue to virtue, from knowledge to knowledge, from glory to glory. This is a dynamic movement of unceasing renewal in the grace of the Holy Spirit. As St. Gregory of Nyssa explains: A Christian "is ever changing for the better and transforming from glory to glory through daily growth, by always improving and always becoming deified and yet without ever reaching the end of perfection. For true perfection means that one never ceases to grow toward that which is better and never reduces perfection to any limit."⁴

The grace of God shapes the apostolic "being" – as St. Paul explains: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). And this grace in turn becomes an inexhaustible source of action (Acts 14:26, 15:40). The disciples do not remain satisfied with their personal enjoyment of grace: "And his grace toward me has not been in vain." Grace becomes service, a creative struggle for healing, reconciliation, the spreading of the Gospel for the transformation of all. Yet, St. Paul again corrects himself: "Though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Cor. 15:11)

⁴ To Olympios, About perfections, Greek Fathers of the Church, Gregory Nyssa, vol. 8, Thessaloniki 1980, 422.

2. The struggle for inner transformation, in accordance with the example of Christ, takes place in the church. The faithful Christian struggles and is sanctified as a member of the Body of Christ. Consequently, personal renewal and transformation is reflected within the entire community of the church. “Jesus Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), is the head of the Church, which is his body, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and in this sense the church cannot sin. Therefore, we do not ask for the ‘transformation of the church.’ However, if we are referring to ‘the churches’, specifically in the sense of communities of believers in history, we know full well that believers sometimes fail to actualize the true being of the Church. It is we sinners, personally and in community, who require transformation”.⁵

The transformative journey of our church communities cannot occur on the basis of criteria occasionally proposed by fashion and vogue, but through the guidance of “the Gospel of grace.” We have in practice often ascertained the substitution of many of God’s commands by the mentality of the world, by a demonic reversal of the evangelical principles. Instead of the primacy of service, we have craved the primacy of authority; instead of the power of love, the love of the power of this world; instead of respect for others, we have demanded their submission to our opinions and desires. The church is obliged to remain at every time and in every place what its essence is: namely, the Body of Christ, “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23), word, light, the witness of whom embraces all things with his love, transforming them. All other social and cultural actions are incidental; they are the historical expression and incarnation of love in specific circumstances and conditions.

3. Obviously, however, we cannot become a closed community “of saved ones,” isolated from events on the planet. Our responsibility extends to the universe, to the journey of the entire world.

a) Since our assembly is taking place in Latin America, the issue of poverty assumes absolute priority for all of us who worship and follow him, who was born and died stressing the dignity of the poor and their inalienable value before God, who came “to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18) In the face of all the poor – the hungry, estranged, and refugees – we are obliged to discern the face of Jesus. Woe to us if, in the 21st century, we again relinquish the initiative for social justice to others, as we have done in past centuries, while we confine ourselves to our opulent rituals, to our usual alliance with the powerful. Woe to us if we permit other forces, with different religious ideas and ambitions, to assume leadership in the struggle to overcome poverty in our world.

In our age, a globally interdependent society is taking shape, and our most fundamental problem is how we might become conscious as Christians of our obligation towards those

⁵ Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Ed.), *Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Porto Alegre* (Final Report), WCC, Geneva 2005, 4.

who are deprived of the most basic goods, as well as our practical solidarity with these people within our cities and our nations, from country to country and from church to church. We can no longer claim ignorance or indifference before the millions of children that live in miserable conditions, before the one billion fellow human beings that are undernourished while another three billion survive on less than two dollars a day.

Before the challenge of economic globalization, which is solely concerned with broadening the market, while levelling cultural and popular diversities, we are called as Christians to respond with enlightened initiatives for a society of understanding, healing, reconciliation and fraternization, based on respect for each human person and each people, promoting mutual understanding and solidarity throughout the planet. We are called to promote daring initiatives and just social struggles, commencing with our own immediate environment, the family, our parish and city, our diocese and region. We are called, moreover, to practise our immediate responsibility within our specific circumstances, keeping the entire world in mind as our broader horizon.

b) On our planet, peace continues to be injured on a daily basis. The peace proclaimed by the New Testament is multidimensional: it is personal and social, yet at the same time it is sanctifying, holistic, and eschatological. With God's grace, we are obliged to struggle so that the visible and invisible conflicts may be transformed and peace may prevail in our immediate and wider environment. St. Basil the Great states: "Nothing is more characteristic of a Christian than peacemaking; for that, the Lord promised us the greatest reward";⁶ that is to be called "sons of God".

Of course, peace cannot develop of itself. It is related to other significant values in life. Above all, it is related to justice. An unjust, unlawful world cannot expect peace. Genuine longing for peace on a global, local or personal level, is expressed through the struggle for justice. Nevertheless, today, peace and justice have yet another name: development. And all of us, who yearn and pray for the transformation of our world, have a duty to contribute to the development of poorer nations.

c) However, even in nations that appear secure and peaceful, every now and again one observes outbreaks of violence. As a rule, those who are more powerful are also more liable to violence. This is because they have the possibility to impose their self-interested plans in a variety of means, with authoritarian methods, through the violation of information, by electronic and human brainwashing, by use of threat and blackmailing of conscience. Yet violence is not only found where powers are great, nor only where the mass media turn our attention. It is also detected in smaller nations, cities, villages, communities – even religious ones – and indeed wherever people live. Aggression is concealed within every human heart.

⁶ Epist. 113, PG 32.528

In beseeching, then, for the transformation of our world, let us make a firm decision to struggle, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome violence wherever we possibly can: in our family and society, as well as in the political and international community.

d) Finally, the ecological destruction provoked by the irrational exploitation of the earth's natural resources is creating serious concerns for the future of our planet. Therefore, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew points out "whenever we narrow religious life to our own concerns, we overlook the prophetic calling of the Church to implore God and to invoke the Divine Spirit for the renewal of the whole polluted cosmos. Indeed, the entire cosmos is the space within which transformation is enacted."⁷ All our efforts in this domain will be productive when they take place in the Holy Spirit, "from whom grace and life come to all creation"⁸ as we sing in the Orthodox Church. For "through the Holy Spirit spring the sources of grace, watering and reviving the entire creation."⁹ St. Gregory Palamas defines the duty and ethos of every faithful with regard to nature, when he states that the heart of a person illumined by the eternal uncreated light "embraces the whole of creation".

III Inspired by the "Gospel of grace"

1. The manner in which Christ came into the world never ceases to amaze. The Saviour's entire life and preaching revealed the mystical power of humility. Our Lord "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:7-8)

Naturally, the ways of modern society are completely contrary to the spirit of humility. What attracts the attention of most is normally what most impresses, whatever is related to glamour, money, and illusion. Even within church circles, in spite of much talk about humility and similar things, people's ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour often betray pride and arrogance. Yet humility in Christ reveals the secret of the spiritual radiance and the transforming power of the Church. The authentic witness of the Church is borne through the centuries by the sincere humility of those dedicated to God. "For great is the might of the Lord; but by the humble he is glorified." (Sirach 3:20) In fact, Holy Scripture insists: "The Lord opposes the proud, but to the humble he shows favour." (Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5) When, therefore, we pray: "God, in your grace, transform the world," let us not overlook for a moment that the magnet for God's grace is humility. As a way of life, humility nourishes our thought and creativity.

⁷ "Transformation calls for metanoia", Address on the theme of the WCC 9th Assembly.

⁸ Paraklitiki, Sunday Matins (Orthros), Third Tone.

⁹ Ibid J. Pelikan: Jesus through the centuries, Yale University Press 1985, 7., Fourth Tome.

2. What is able, above and beyond all else, to transform everything in the world is the sacrificial offering of love. With the entrance of the divine Word into the historical march of humanity, God's love was revealed in the most shattering manner: it was incarnated. This truth remains the root of Christian revelation, which nurtures every other Christian value and proposal. "For God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:8-9)

The fundamental mission, then, of the Church is to reveal and make manifest God's love in the here and now, in each moment and every place where it is and acts. In this way, it contributes essentially to the transformation of the world. Otherwise, it resembles "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal," even if it possesses the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith; even if it understands all the mysteries; even if it is known for great and impressive actions (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Each cell of the visible Body of Christ, every Christian, is called to incarnate with his or her entire being and work God's love in the particular circumstances of their life. By denying ourselves and assuming the cross (cf. Matt. 16:24) in our daily life, by supporting those around us in their sorrow, their loneliness, and their need. Whoever is "in God" endeavours to love like God. God's love takes daring initiatives, knows no boundaries, and embraces all things. The conviction that "God is love" comforts us and liberates us from multifaceted fear, from fear of the other, from fear of the different, or from fear of human developments that often appear threatening. Furthermore, God's love comforts us and liberates us from fear of our failure and from fear of the abyss within our soul. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18)

Many of those who deny or resist the name "God" indirectly accept his other name: Love. The fact that love constitutes the supreme value of life, the mystical force of the world, is becoming increasingly acceptable even by people of other religious persuasions through diverse experiences and ways of thinking. Love becomes the mystical passage which leads people – perhaps without their even knowing it – closer to the God of love. Ultimately, it comprises the secret to the transformation of the world.

3. Finally, both our prayer and our participation in the transformative evolution of the world must take place within an atmosphere of joy and doxology. Joy is the distinctive fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is the characteristic of those who belong to the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17; 1 Thess. 1:6). The radiance of essential love calmly triumphs over sin, pain, and contempt. It was, from the outset, the definitive feature of the Christians. With the joy of selfless love, the joy of the perpetual presence of the risen Christ in the Holy Spirit, the church proceeds triumphantly amid the world. And it loses the world when it loses this joy. Christ offered us a "joy in fullness," (John 16:24) which no one can remove from us. The experience of this joy determines our daily life. St. Paul incites us: "Rejoice in the Lord

always; again I will say, rejoice.” (Phil. 4:4) And St. Peter also insists: “Believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.” (1 Peter 1:8)

Our theological reflection and our prayer concerning the transformation of the world are developed more fully within the context of doxology. With the institution of the eucharistic gathering, the church chose from the very first moment a doxological stance to implore God’s grace and proclaim “the Gospel of grace” (Acts 20:24), Christ’s “Gospel of glory” (2 Cor. 4:4). Through doxology, in a harmonious synthesis with the beauty of liturgical worship, the church powerfully expresses the acquisition of the divine grace and the appropriation of the divine glory.

This doxology of the church is a foretaste and prelude of the eschatological hour, when the universe will be transformed within the absolute manifestation of God’s glory. Each creative effort and participation in this – every ministry in the Church, every expression of love – constitutes a ray of God’s loving grace and glory. It signifies a sharing in the renewal of the whole of creation.

By way of conclusion, I would like to remind you that term “grace” in Greek denotes, among other things, the brilliance of beauty and goodness. I often recall the expression of a contemporary computer scientist, who said that just as the laws of physics support the theory that gravity, weight and mass were not distinguished in the first moments of the universe, in a similar way, I think, God did not create the world with truth, beauty and goodness separated from one another.

And I, too, believe that, in the future, this “classical triad of the beautiful, the true and the good, which has itself played a significant role in the history of Christian thought”¹⁰ will contribute to the transformation of the world.

With our gaze firmly set on Christ, our Lord, who is the absolute truth, the boundless beauty and the incarnate love of God in the world, let us contribute, to the best of our ability, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to the transformation of the world.

Eternal and infinite God! As we behold in ecstasy the boundlessness of the macrocosm that surrounds us and the boundlessness of the microcosm that we inhabit, we kneel humbly before You in prayer. Through Your grace, incarnate in the person of Your Son and unceasingly active through Your Spirit, transform our existence; transform our world into a world illumined by Your truth, by Your beauty, and by Your love.

FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS

Closing sermon on Revelation 22: 1 – 5

Rev. Robina Marie Winbush

Rev. Robina Winbush is director of the Department of Ecumenical and Agency Relationships of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

To the Moderator, Vice Moderators, Presidents, General Secretary and staff, delegates, representatives, observers, friends, my sisters and brothers in Christ and creation, I greet you this afternoon in the name of and with the awesome joy of Jesus – the One who is, now and forever, the Head of the Church.

Would you join me in prayer?

Hide your servant daughter behind the cross, that your glory might come forth, your people might be blessed, and your healing leaves might emerge; in the name of the one who is the Living Word, Jesus the Christ, we dare to pray and I dare to preach.

Amen.

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood
in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when the dawns were young.

I built my hut by the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,
and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers.

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.¹

¹ The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright © 1994 the Estate of Langston Hughes. Permission requested.

In this classic poem by Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” Hughes writes to remind a people who had been enslaved that their history began long before 1619, when their ancestors who had been snatched from their homelands, survived the horrors of the Middle Passage and were brought in chains to the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Brazil. He writes to remind them that theirs is not a legacy of enslavement, but that their history began along the rivers of Africa, and that they were connected to a people and carried within their spiritual DNA the rich resources of a people and land from whom they had been separated.

As we prepare to leave Porto Alegre and the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, concluding a week of phenomenal worship; edifying Bible studies; challenging plenaries; long committee meetings and business sessions; motivating offerings in the *mutirão*; meeting, greeting and networking with sisters and brothers of a common faith and common family; we pause for just one more opportunity to see if there is one more “word from the Lord.” Something that we can carry home with us — not another piece of paper, not a wristband or souvenir, not another book or media resource, but something we can carry deep within our spiritual reservoir that will allow the energy, the renewal, and the commitments not to be lost in the busyness and routines of our lives when we return home.

I was initially drawn to the Revelation text because of the baptismal and eucharistic images and the eschatological themes of a new and transformed world. I thought it would be an appropriate ending to an assembly that had prayed and sought to understand the transforming power of God. What greater transformation than a vision of the New Jerusalem and the eschatological promises given to us through John’s vision!

John, the writer of Revelation, has been exiled to an island called Patmos. He writes to a people living under persecution and domination by the Roman Empire, telling them that their current reality is not the definitive word of God. They are part of a larger, cosmic plan, and he writes to remind them that theirs is not the seduction of the empire, but ultimately the victory of the Divine and reign of Christ. Nester Miguez notes:

Revelation is written and originally read in a situation of powerlessness. John of Patmos and his readers live in a situation in which they are the subjects of an imperial power that admits no dissent ... The small communities of Christians in Asia Minor do not constitute any real challenge to Roman power, but if they manifest any kind of symbolic opposition to the Emperor’s claim to unchecked dominion they are in trouble. And that is the case in Revelation.²

² Nestor O Miguez, *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium*. ed by Philip Wickeri, with Janice K. Wickeri and Damayanthi M. A. Niles. (London: The Council for World Mission, 2000) p. 239.

Miguez notes that “when read under that condition Revelation gives a message that is quite different from its use by the powerful and mighty.”³

Miguez suggest

the original intention of Revelation as a challenge to imperial power was co-opted when the Christian church became the Church of the Empire and the missionary enterprise became the partner (willing or not) of the expansion of western culture and power.⁴

So we approach the Revelation of Jesus to John on the island of Patmos, both as an eschatological promise of what is to come and as a socio-political-religious critique of the Roman Empire and the empty claims of empire over the eternal assurances of the God of creation and the resurrected Christ who reigns in victory. John writes of the collusion of systems of economic, military, cultural, and, yes, religious powers that wage war against the Divine, the faithful, and all of creation that have not bowed down to the images of the empire’s temporal glory. He reminds the churches of Asia Minor and, yes, the church universal, that their primary – no, our only – allegiance must be to the Lamb who was slain, but now reigns upon the throne. We must resist the temptation to be co-opted by systems of domination and exploitation. In the midst of cosmic chaos and global imperial systems, it is a call – a reminder – that we are never to abandon our posts as faithful witnesses to the resurrected Christ – the living Lord. Ours is never to be an easy, comfortable relationship with empire, but a relationship that measures the work of empire by the self-sacrificing standards of the cross. Brian Blount suggest that

Revelation craves witnesses as engaged, resistant, transformative activism that is willing to sacrifice everything in an effort to make the world over into a reality that responds to and operates from Jesus’ role as ruler and savior of all.⁵

Yes, to read Revelation is to understand with powerful images Paul’s words to the church at Ephesus: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”⁶

Sue Davies also reminds us, “while John’s apocalypse offers fertile ground for identifying the death dealing powers of our own day, he also affirms in the strongest terms God’s sovereignty over human and earthly history.”⁷ It is this affirmation that I invite you to explore with me this afternoon as we finish packing our spiritual bags to go home.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness: Reading Revelation through African American Culture*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 38.

⁶ Ephesians 6:12 KJV

⁷ Susan E. Davies, *The Accra Confession: A View From the Belly of the Beast*. While here in Porto Alegre, Sue shared with me this paper, which was presented at a World Alliance of Reformed Churches consultation on Women and Globalization in August 2005, in Jamaica.

Yes, Revelation is filled with eschatological hope. However, what if we were to consider that Revelation is not simply a vision of what is to come, but a vision of what is already? I have been blessed to have travelling with me a dear sister who has not been involved in the intricacies of this assembly. Whenever I get frustrated or bothered by something that has happened, she is always good to remind me, “God is not finished. God is still moving.” We don’t have to wait for God to be sovereign — God is sovereign now! John shares with us a glimpse of what is already in the realms beyond our reality and the limitations of our current comprehension. It becomes an invitation to live as though the reign of God and the community of God’s beloved kin-dom are already.

When I was a child, there was a simple song we used to sing in my home church, Bethany Presbyterian in Columbus, Ohio. I must admit that we didn’t sing it often during formal Sunday worship, but it could be heard during revival or mid-week services or any time we would dare to allow ourselves to feel the freedom and power of the Holy Spirit. The words were very simple,

“God is already here. Can’t you feel [God’s] presence? God’s already here.

All you have to do is open up your heart, for God is already here.”

It carried a simple, but profound message. The God we serve is not far off in some distant realm, but because of the grace of God in the incarnation event, God has chosen to make God’s dwelling in the midst of human reality. It isn’t that our worlds are perfected, but in the very messiness and problems of human reality, God chooses to dwell.

We have been praying throughout this 9th Assembly, “God, in your grace, transform the world.” It is a prayer that carries, as most prayers do, a confession of faith. It is a confession that we believe that the world needs to be transformed. It is a confession that we believe that the world can be transformed. It is a confession that we believe it is the free gift of God’s love we know as grace that will accomplish the transformation. It is a powerful prayer and a powerful confession.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, assures us that before we call, God will answer us, and while we are yet speaking, God hears us.⁸

Would you consider with me the possibility that God has been whispering to our spirits throughout this assembly, “I am transforming the world”?

We are meeting in the same location as the World Social Forum that has previously declared, “Another World is Possible.” As people of faith — as those who claim the name of the anointed one, Jesus of Nazareth — we come to give spiritual testimony to that truth. Another world really is possible.

⁸ Isaiah 65:24.

The final vision that John records is of a world in transformation. John writes of a river not contaminated with the excess waste of the empire or the waste of cosmic catastrophes, but of a life-giving river that nourishes the earth and all creation. It is a river that cannot be privatised or exploited for the benefit of a few. Unlike Ezekiel's vision, John's vision of the river is not restricted to the Temple as God's dwelling place, but it flows freely and directly from the throne of God. Could it be possible that "the river which makes glad the city of God," as described by the psalmist, is not limited or controlled by our ecclesiastical houses, but is the free-flowing power of the Spirit of God in our midst? Could it be possible that we who are washed in the baptismal waters of God's grace and nurtured with the very life force of the Lamb—the body and blood of the crucified and resurrected Christ—are invited to be participants in God's transforming work of creation?

Unlike the Genesis narrative, the tree of life is no longer inaccessible to humanity, but as it grows alongside the river, it draws from the free-flowing Spirit that comes from the presence of God in the midst of the city. Because the tree draws from the river of life, its fruit is plentiful and sufficient. Its leaves are filled with the medicinal qualities that heal and transform nations.

Tell me, have you seen any leaves lately that God is using to heal nations and transform a world?

Before we arrived in Porto Alegre, a small group of us stopped by Salvador, Bahia. We were privileged to visit with some powerful women related to the Institute for Theological Education in Bahia (ITEBA). They have formed a group called YAMI—symbolized by cactus growing fruit in the desert. Theirs is a commitment to give voice and agency to black, indigenous and poor women of northeastern Brazil. They invited us to visit a community centre the women are building on land that had been used as a "quilombo." Quilombos were highly organized communities of Africans that refused to be enslaved when brought to Brazil. This particular quilombo was named after a black woman named Zeferina, who was known for her strong resistance to oppression. You didn't mess with this sister! The Zeferina Quilombo community centre is being built to give voice and agency to the women and children of the surrounding community so that they can take control of their own lives. I don't know about you, but to me that's a healing leaf!

In the nightmare of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, instead of waiting for the moral consciousness of northern and western pharmaceutical companies to be awakened, I am told that Brazil produces medicines that can be made available for use in countries that cannot afford them. That's a healing leaf!

When Cindy Sheehan, a mother whose son was killed in the war on Iraq mobilizes other mothers and families to openly challenge the Bush administration on their corrupt war policies, that's a healing leaf!

When a former U.S. military base in Cuba is transformed into a university, training over 7,000 medical doctors in Latin America, that's literally a healing leaf.

When Palestinian Christian youth tell us they cannot be silent in the face of occupation and oppression, that they must teach hope and commit themselves to be agents of hope in the midst of violence, that's a healing leaf!

When one young person in Europe believes that they can make a difference and organizes an international movement of youth and young adults who are committed to be change makers, that's a healing leaf!

When we experience the growth of Christianity in Africa and Asia and Latin America, and the paradigm shift from a Christianity defined by the rich and powerful, that's a healing leaf!

When the World Council of Churches can break the silence and the denial and begin to talk openly and honestly about issues of human sexuality and facilitate dialogue between and within our churches, that's a healing leaf!

When the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network can help us redefine our understanding of healing and wholeness, and while everyone may not have the same physical and mental abilities—that all are created in the image of God—that's a healing leaf!

I could go on, but I suspect everyone here could testify to the healing leaves that you have experienced and seen.

There is a question I need to ask you before you go.

God is transforming the world: Are you willing to be a leaf on the tree of life, whom God uses for the healing of the nations? Are you willing to resist bowing down to the temporal gods of exploitation and domination and allow your life and your churches to be used for the healing of the nations and transformation of the world?

Remember that the power and strength to be a leaf does not belong to you. It is a result of being attached to the tree of life whose roots are watered by the river of life that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. When you grow weary and tired, rest assured that the river of life will nourish you. You will be reminded that you are connected to something far greater than your current reality, and the words of Langston will still speak to us: "I've known rivers—ancient, dusky rivers. My soul has grown deep like the river."

MESSAGE OF THE 9TH ASSEMBLY OF THE WCC

The following message was presented to and approved by the Assembly through consensus.

“God, in your Grace, Transform the World” Message of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches: An Invitation to Prayer

Sisters and brothers, we greet you in Christ. As representatives of churches from all the world's regions, we gather in Porto Alegre, Brazil, meeting in the first decade of the third millennium, in the first assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Latin America. We have been invited here to join in *a festa da vida*, the feast of life. We are praying, reflecting on the scriptures, struggling and rejoicing together in our unity and diversity, and seeking to listen carefully to one another in the spirit of consensus.

Meeting in February 2006, we are made aware by Assembly participants of cries arising daily in their home countries and regions due to disasters, violent conflicts and conditions of oppression and suffering. Yet we are also empowered by God to bear witness to transformation in personal lives, churches, societies and the world as a whole.

Specific challenges and calls to action are being communicated to the churches and the world in the reports and decisions of the Assembly, such as: the quest for Christian unity; our mid-term call to recommitment to the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010); discernment of prophetic and programmatic means to achieve global economic justice; engagement in inter-religious dialogue; full inter-generational participation of all women and men, and common statements addressing the churches and the world on public issues.

The theme of this Ninth Assembly is a prayer, “God, in your grace, transform the world”. In prayer our hearts are transformed, and so we offer our message as prayer:

God of grace,
together we turn to you in prayer, for it is you who unite us:
you are the one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in whom we believe,
you alone empower us for good,
you send us out across the earth in mission and service in the name of Christ.

We confess before you and all people:
We have been unworthy servants.
We have misused and abused the creation.
We have wounded one another by divisions everywhere.
We have often failed to take decisive action against environmental destruction,

poverty, racism, caste-ism, war and genocide.

We are not only victims but also perpetrators of violence.

In all this, we have fallen short as disciples of Jesus Christ who in his incarnation came to save us and teach us how to love.

Forgive us, God, and teach us to forgive one another.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, hear the cries of all creation,

the cries of the waters, the air, the land and all living things;

the cries of all who are exploited, marginalised, abused and victimized,

all who are dispossessed and silenced, their humanity ignored,

all who suffer from any form of disease, from war

and from the crimes of the arrogant who hide from the truth,

distort memory and deny the possibility of reconciliation.

God, guide all in seats of authority towards decisions of moral integrity.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

We give thanks for your blessings and signs of hope that are already present in the world, in people of all ages and in those who have gone before us in faith;

in movements to overcome violence in all its forms, not just for a decade but for always;

in the deep and open dialogues that have begun both within our own churches and with those of other faiths in the search for mutual understanding and respect;

in all those working together for justice and peace -

both in exceptional circumstances and every day.

We thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ, and the assurance of resurrection.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

By the power and guidance of your Holy Spirit, O God,

may our prayers never be empty words

but an urgent response to your living Word -

in non-violent direct action for positive change,

in bold, clear, specific acts of solidarity, liberation, healing and compassion,

readily sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Open our hearts to love and to see that all people are made in your image,

to care for creation and affirm life in all its wondrous diversity.

Transform us in the offering of ourselves so that we may be your partners in transformation

to strive for the full, visible unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ,

to become neighbours to all,

as we await with eager longing the full revelation of your rule

in the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

Amen.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE MUTIRÃO?

Simon Oxley

Simon Oxley was co-moderator of the WCC staff group responsible for the Mutirão.

The 9th Assembly said many things, most of which you can read in this issue of Ecumenical Review. They will guide the work of the WCC and, hopefully, inspire and encourage the whole ecumenical movement. The record of the assembly in image and sound as well as word is an essential tool for shaping the future. An analysis of what we can learn from the actual experience is also vital if the assembly is to be transformational. This article reflects on what we can learn from the *mutirão* from the perspective of a WCC staff member.

In the evaluations of the assembly we have received a great deal of positive feedback from those who participated in the *mutirão*. They spoke warmly of the opportunities to encounter, engage and reflect. If there was a criticism, it was of too much choice. Each participant's view of the *mutirão* would be different as each would have had their own set of experiences. This article can give an overview and some analysis but it cannot convey those deep moments experienced by individual participants.

The WCC has a habit of adopting words from the host culture as a title for activities in major events. There is always some discussion as to whether this is a respectful use of the word. For the Harare assembly, for example, we used *padare* to describe workshops offered in a themed programme. As the planning for the 9th Assembly began there was talk of *officinas* – workshops. Many thought that this was too prosaic and that we needed a word which had a more creative and dynamic feel and one which would include many different kinds of activities. We found this in the word *Mutirão* and added a sub-title 'Coming together to make a difference'.

The brochure described it thus:

The word *mutirão* comes from a Brazilian word meaning a meeting place, an opportunity to work together for a common purpose, a space to discuss and argue with each other in building a common dream. In Brazil, for example, people in poor communities sometimes "make a *mutirão*" to build a house together. They ensure that there is the needed expertise on how to build a house and then the community joins in to work together to realize a common, concrete objective.

The *mutirão* at the assembly will provide a space for reflection, celebration, and exhibits. A full programme will provide a rich array of offerings on many different issues, organized by churches and related organizations in all parts of the world.

One of WCC's aspirations for the 9th Assembly was that it would be an ecumenical formation experience for participants. My own interpretation of that was that it should be more than an opportunity for participants to learn *about* the working and concerns of the ecumenical movement in general and the WCC specifically. It should be an opportunity to *become* ecumenical in their understanding, sympathy, relationships and commitment, leading to ecumenical action. If you like, participation in the assembly would be a process of conscientisation – a concept WCC learned from the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, when he worked with us. We could say that without conscientisation there cannot be transformation.

The *mutirão* was a space that surrounded and was within the programme for the assembly delegates. It was not simply the visitors' programme of former assemblies nor was it a workshop and exhibition programme as in Harare. It did include such elements but was more. The detailed planning for the *mutirão* was undertaken by a Geneva staff team in close collaboration with a Latin American working group and the local organizers so that there was a strong input from the regional context of the assembly as well as a global dimension. This partnership was successful in both the preparatory stages and in Porto Alegre to a degree for which we had not dared hope. One of the keys to this may be that the WCC's lack of capacity to do everything meant that we had to trust our partners rather than control them.

We invited people to apply to offer workshops in the *mutirão*. The purpose of these was to explore an issue using participants' experience rather than to promote particular organizations. Agencies and issue-based networks were quick to respond, probably because they were accustomed to doing so for events like the World Social Forum. Others required some prompting in order to fill gaps that we identified. It was noticeable that churches *per se* did not tend to offer workshops even though they were invited. In Porto Alegre several church representatives remarked that they could have made a contribution had they thought about it.

Our philosophy was to offer spaces for workshops and let the organizers do them in their own way. However, we were proactive in requesting those who offered the same theme to work together on a joint workshop. This set up some positive collaborations between people who had never worked together before. Unfortunately, some could not rise to this challenge. We asked people to think beyond panel discussions and powerpoint presentations towards more creative and engaging styles. As well as encouraging an emphasis on participation rather than presentation in the workshops, we asked organizers to indicate the potential for the involvement of youth. One response was that youth would set up the room – moving table and chairs was not exactly what we had in mind!

In Porto Alegre participants were confronted with a workshop programme that engaged with almost every area of concern to the ecumenical movement – the challenges that confront humanity and those specific to the churches. It would not be very informative to list all the themes of the workshops but that information is available should anyone be interested in doing some research. The most frequently addressed single issue was HIV/AIDS. As the evaluation sheets for these particular workshops indicated very similar outcomes about the needs and the involvement of the ecumenical movement, we might draw the conclusion that we should have reduced their number by further mergers. However, to have done that could have been to reduce the focus on an area that presents deep theological and humanitarian challenges.

The largest number of workshops were on offer at lunchtimes each day when most people, delegates included, were free to attend. There were also a smaller range of workshops running parallel to most plenary sessions. The majority of workshops were full to overflowing and the evaluations produced indicated that almost all were highly participative. Most of them were held in a large building composed almost entirely of seminar rooms. This eased organizational logistics and made it simple for participants to locate their workshop. Equally importantly it gave the psychological focus of a common open space in which there were many more focused spaces.

The variety of workshop themes was reflected in the *mutirão* exhibition space which was well-situated outside the plenary hall. This area was a space of gathering before and after sessions which meant a high level of engagement between exhibitors and other assembly participants. It could be said that the exhibitions as such were not so significant as the opportunity they created for conversation. Display panels and leaflets may inform but are unlikely to transform. Talking to those responsible for exhibits, there was excitement about the encounters they had had with the other participants.

Following the daily morning prayer, the delegates and other representatives were involved in Bible study and reflection in small groups. The *mutirão* was faced with having to provide Bible study for a considerably larger number of people in the plenary hall and two lecture theatres. Portuguese and Spanish speakers each had their own sessions. For the English (plus other languages) Bible studies in the plenary hall, there was an initial temptation to plan a series of lectures. However, we were able to bring together a denominationally and regionally diverse group of facilitators. Their experience enabled us to use the space in a way that imaginatively engaged the participants through the use of music and video clips as well as the spoken word and set up an interactive small group process in the hall.

A similar challenge was faced in the plenary hall for the three *mutirão* ecumenical formation sessions which took place at the same times as the Ecumenical Conversations in the programme for delegates. While the workshops were mainly focussed on the work of the ecu-

menical movement, these sessions were planned to help participants understand ecumenism and develop their commitment to being ecumenical. We developed a participative process which created opportunities for participants to reflect on their own ecumenical experience and listen to one another. Three case studies were offered that illustrated different forms of ecumenism, uniting churches and ecumenical social action. The sessions were facilitated by four young women which is an interesting statement in itself.

It is often the experience of large events that series of things like the *mutirão* Bible studies or the ecumenical formation sessions see a drop off in attendance as time goes on. This was not our experience in Porto Alegre and is an indication of the value participants placed on the possibility for interaction they provided.

In the first part of each lunch break there was an event called *Bate papo*, meaning to chat with. This evolved from realizing that we would have on campus several well-known personalities. Participants would welcome an opportunity to listen to them outside the programme of the plenary hall. However, as we looked at the list we saw older people, mainly men. How could we honour the intent to make an assembly with an accent on youth? If we included some young adults in this list, would participants come to listen to them? The concept of the *Bate papo* came as we recognized that we could set up a series of conversations between younger and older ecumenists. This format proved to be creative.

There were many dedicated spaces in which people could gather. One of these was the *Café Teológico* (Theological Café). For some, especially those not familiar with the idea of an internet café, the concept was confusing. The reality was more straightforward. The *Café Teológico* was organized by the Brazilian Association of Theological Schools (ASTE) together with the Association of Ecumenical Theological Schools in Latin America and the Caribbean (CETELA) and the Ecumenical Bible Institute (CEBI). The *Café* did serve coffee as well as a series of book presentations and discussions with authors and round table conversations on theological issues. This space provided an ecumenical focal point for Latin American theological educators and drew in those from other regions.

In his report, the General Secretary spoke of the *feita da vida* – the feast of life. The *mutirão* cultural presentations captured that spirit. Music, dance and drama in various places on the campus offered another way of engaging as well as adding to the vitality of the assembly. In spite of the ecumenical movement's concentration on the cognitive in our discussion and conversations, we should never underestimate the power of the affective and experiential in forming us ecumenically.

Working on the *mutirão* was one of the best experience I have had in my ten years with the WCC. It gave an opportunity to work with WCC colleagues whom I knew but had never worked with before. One hopes that this really will be the style of the post-Porto Alegre

WCC. It was enriching to be with the volunteers from Brazil and the rest of Latin America, the WCC interns and the stewards who together made the *mutirão* work. At the end of assembly debriefing we held for the stewards, I was touched by the deep way the *mutirão* experience had affected them. The enthusiastic response of the participants to the *mutirão* was humbling for all we had done is create the space for them to use.

What can we learn from the experience of the *mutirão*? I want to make nine comments out of my own reflections.

1. The *mutirão* demonstrated the potential of creating space for people to experience, relate and learn together. The space does not need to be controlled but it does need to be structured so that it is open and creative. In the *mutirão*, participants demonstrated a responsibility towards one another in their discourse. The WCC has an important global function as an ecumenical space-creator.

2. The *mutirão* demonstrated a commitment and vitality in the ecumenical movement which the institutional WCC has not always reflected. I felt excited and energized, as did many others, by the *mutirão* and I hope that it will have the same effect on the WCC as a whole. The WCC needs to use the methodology of the *mutirão* to continue to draw on and encourage that vitality.

3. The *mutirão* demonstrated that having limited resources can open the way to creative partnerships. Having a sufficiency of resources can lead of a mentality of having a sufficiency of thinking – an attitude that says ‘if you want to work with us you have to do it our way’. We could not have provided the *mutirão* without real and trusting collaboration with partners. It was a richer experience for their thinking as well as their labour.

4. The *mutirão* demonstrated that we need a holistic approach to ecumenical formation. The power of the ecumenical movement comes from people who are engaged, excited and committed. Transformation requires inspiration as well as information.

5. The *mutirão* demonstrated that young adults can exercise enabling skills and offer leadership to all generations and not just their own. Ecumenical formation is not just the young learning from the old but the old learning from the young and all learning together.

6. The *mutirão* demonstrated how with imagination one can overcome the physical constraints of rooms and halls to produce creative and involving sessions. Just because a room was designed for someone to speak to an audience sitting in front of them does not mean that we have to use it only in that way. The limitations are not of bricks and mortar, chairs and tables but of our imaginations.

7. The response to the invitation to offer workshops, exhibitions and cultural events indicates that we need to do more work on involving the churches on a future occasion. The

mutirão would have been the richer for more church participation alongside agencies, networks and the like. Expressions of regret by church representatives on an opportunity missed may be forgotten. The WCC should remember.

8. There was criticism that the *mutirão* did not influence the formal assembly. As a statement of process that is true. From the beginning we had tried to stress that participation in the *mutirão* in whatever way, by offering workshops and events or by attending, had a value in itself – that this kind of participation is the way the ecumenical builds itself up and sustains itself. However we had also planned some strategies by which insights could be fed into the formal assembly. The only one that really functioned was a wall by the plenary hall with messages ‘From the *mutirão* to the Assembly’. How effective that was is open to question. One of the creative strengths of the *mutirão* was its freedom and openness. Had it been tied more closely to the formal assembly programme, each workshop and other event would have been subject to the controls, the checks and balances that were applied to the plenary sessions and Ecumenical Conversations. There is, anyway, a question as to whether the real strength of an assembly lies in the decisions and statements it makes or in the effect its whole life has on the delegates and through them on the churches. This is an issue that will remain with us.

9. The self-criticism I would make is that I fear that participants went away from the *mutirão* with many undifferentiated experiences, ideas and challenges – each one interesting and exciting but all jumbled together. They may have returned home with good ecumenical ‘travellers tales’ of people they met and things they learnt. Enthused but confused. What we did not do, as we all too often do not, is to give participants opportunity to reflect on their experiences together, to integrate and internalise them. I think that this is particularly serious in the light of the assembly theme – God, in your grace, transform the world. Transformation does not happen simply because people have new experiences, learn new things or meet new people. Something has to happen to integrate those to transform ways of knowing, relating, acting and believing. We should not arrogate to ourselves the work of the Holy Spirit but we should use the wisdom we have to create the right spaces for transformation to take place.

Sometimes I think that our understandable seriousness and ‘ecumenical correctness’ draws the life out of the ecumenical movement. The *joie de vivre* of the *feira da vida*, if it is permissible to mix languages, is not always apparent. So the final word should be given to the participant who wrote about one of the *mutirão* workshops. After commenting on the creative and relaxed atmosphere and the participation of people of different ethnicities, gender and position, they wrote, “A lot of laughter – the ecumenical movement can be FUN”.

CELEBRATING LIFE — A FESTA DA VIDA

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia is General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

1. How wonderful it is to be here in Brazil! How wonderful it is to be together! Let me add my words of welcome to all of you to this first WCC Assembly in the 21st century and the first to take place in this region. Special thanks to our Brazilian hosts, for their overwhelming hospitality, and excellent preparations for this assembly.

2. God, in your grace, transform the world! This theme has come alive to me during my visits to member churches in the past two years. And, as we meet here on this continent, we celebrate with the people in South America the recent election of Mme Michelle Bachelet as the first woman President of Chile and Evo Morales as the first Indigenous President of Bolivia. Commenting on these historic developments, one Latin American ecumenical friend told me, “this signifies that the seeds of peace, justice and democracy which were planted twenty or thirty years ago have grown up through the years and are now blooming”. He went on to thank the WCC for contributing to the struggles that led to the fruits they are now reaping.

3. That reminded me of the moving experiences I had during my visit to South America in November of 2004. One particular moment was in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The leadership of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo told me that under the dictatorships of the mid-1970s churches and ecumenical organizations provided the “safe place” where the relatives of those who disappeared could meet to share their sorrow and hope. One of them could not hold back her tears as she narrated what the support of WCC had meant to them. She said if it had not been for such accompaniment, most likely she would not be there to tell her story. But what was really impressive for me were the testimonies of those mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared persons. For over thirty years they have lifted up the flame of hope seeking truth and justice. The crucible of their spirit is matched only by their incredible resilience.

4. In my travels I have witnessed again and again such surprising signs of hope. People celebrate life in places where humanly speaking one could only see death and despair. It is this

capacity to celebrate together and to strengthen life in community that has kept Africa going. It reminds me of what links my own experiences as an African with the history of Brazil and of this continent. In the lively and vital celebration of the carnival, I catch glimpses of the African heritage!

5. As a Christian, I discern the gift of God's grace in those moments, when life is transformed and a glimpse of hope becomes reality. It is against such a backdrop that I dream of an ecumenical movement as a movement of people who are messengers of God's grace, a people open to each other and discovering the presence of Christ and of God's grace in the other. To see Christ in the other is so much stronger than all that separates us. The reward in the search for visible unity of the churches in Christ is to discover the presence of the grace of God in each other on the common journey as we walk together.

6. In my report to you today, I would like to make five assertions of an ecumenical movement open to these signs of God's transformative grace as a movement of life. I will talk a bit about this assembly and essential dimensions of the challenge that the WCC is engaging. I speak of an ecumenical movement which:

- is grounded in spirituality
- takes ecumenical formation and youth seriously
- dares to work for transformative justice
- puts relationships at the centre
- takes risks to develop new and creative ways of working

Taking ecumenical formation and youth more seriously

7. We come together here in Porto Alegre to reflect, to deliberate, to discuss, and to make decisions. But most of all, we come together to pray for the unity of the churches and for the world, to rejoice in the shared experience of glorifying God in Christ, and to affirm the deep spiritual bond that holds us together across many divides. Imagine a time ten years from now when this assembly has long been over, when the reports have been written and the decisions duly noted. What will you remember above all else? Most probably, the common prayers in the worship tent, the murmur of the Lord's prayer being said in a hundred different languages; and the exhilarating feeling of this assembly, in all of its glorious diversity, of those who have come together to praise God, the one who has given us life.

8. I invite you to think of the spiritual base of the ecumenical movement as the *feita da vida* – the feast of life. The invitation to the feast comes from God and we are all welcome. This feast, this *feita*, comes to us as grace. The wonder of grace is that it is a gift, which we don't deserve, a reward which we don't earn, but it is freely given and is ours for the partaking. In the Christian tradition, grace is defined as a spiritual, supernatural gift which human

beings receive from God without any merit on their part. Grace can better be defined as signs and, indeed, acts of divine love. Grace reveals itself as God communicating God-self.

9. In an Easter sermon, the father among the Saints, St. John Chrystom, said it wonderfully:

The table is full, all of you enjoy yourselves. The calf is fatted let none go away hungry. All of you enjoy the banquet of the faith. All of you enjoy the richness of God's goodness ... Let no one bewail their faults: for forgiveness has risen from the tomb. Let no one fear death: for the Saviour's death has freed us.

10. *Festa da vida. Fiesta de la vida.* The feast of life. *Fête de la vie. Fest des Lebens. Karamu la maisba!*

11. As churches, we celebrate the life-giving presence of God among us in the Holy Eucharist. It is at the Lord's table that the broken body of Christ and the blood shed on the cross create a new community reconciled with God. This Eucharistic vision of the world, reconciled and united with God in Christ, is at the heart of the visible unity of the church which we seek. This vision is rooted in faith.

12. Spiritual discernment is essential for our way towards unity. When I talk of spirituality, I want to make it clear that I am not referring merely to contemporary religious or quasi-religious responses to the felt lack of a deeper meaning in the values of affluent societies – although the spiritual hunger in those societies is real. I point here to the subject and origin of all life: God's Holy Spirit. All our efforts will be meaningless and powerless if they are not blessed by God and not driven by God's loving grace. After receiving such blessings, one's spiritual life is fully transformed. One's intellect, will and memory are ever more focused on God, thus creating space for a meeting point at which God's love is shared with us. The ecumenical movement is rooted in a common recognition that we are spiritual beings who long to know God and the knowledge that our spiritual quest is enriched by the fellowship we share.

13. Spiritual discernment grounds us. It gives us strength, conviction and the courage to withstand the harsh realities of power. In this fractured and insecure world the forces of globalization and militarism threaten life itself. Being in touch with the word of God and experiencing the presence of God in the other makes us able to withstand the day-to-day rigours of working for peace and justice.

14. Spiritual discernment also allows us to step back from the immediate issues and to see the larger picture. We all get so wrapped up in specific issues, in details of our particular programmes, organizations, issues and constituents that sometimes we lose sight of the big picture. A process of spiritual discernment can get us back on track.

15. I am suggesting that we take a different approach to the 'business' of our meetings: our business is part of the process of spiritual discernment and is embedded in the *festa da vida*.

Let us look at the assembly as a spiritual experience and not just as a business meeting that has to fulfil a constitutional mandate.

16. This assembly is the first to use consensus procedures. Consensus is an effort to build the common mind. The differences among us reflect the realities of our congregations and the lives that we share with people around us. In fact, these differences help us to see the multi-faceted realities and lead us to search for the truth that is not ours, but the truth of the Holy Spirit among us (1 John 5:6). It is this truth that ultimately lies in God that will transform us and make us free (John 8:32). We need to approach consensus these next ten days not as a technique to help us make decisions, but as a process of spiritual discernment.

Taking ecumenical formation and youth more seriously

17. We live in a world of proliferating Christian churches and related organizations, resurgent confessionalism, a shift in the centre of Christianity towards the South, painful internal struggles within church families, the growth of Pentecostalism and of evangelical, conservative and charismatic churches. In mainline Western churches that have been a mainstay of ecumenical councils, we find complex patterns of shifting membership and renewal. A clear vision of what these churches may become is still emerging. All of these trends and uncertainties have made the ecumenical movement fragile.

18. Young people are growing into this reality, struggling for orientation and meaning. The ecumenical movement emerged from the same search for new meaning by an earlier generation of young people. The heritage of those who came before us is too precious to be kept just for us. It must be transmitted to the next generation. We pledge to devote energy and commitment to nurturing a new generation, knowing that this is not just a matter of education and formation, but of trust and participation.

19. Ecumenical formation must be based on the formation of faith. Ecumenical learning is experiential. Young people need opportunities to experience the joy of working and praying with others from different traditions and different contexts. They need support and mentoring to participate fully in ecumenical gatherings with their sometimes intimidating elders. We need to go out to where young people are – to the schools and universities. We need to be willing to change to respond to the demands of young people. We must offer opportunities to know and learn from others through scholarships and travel. At a time when information technology is forever advancing, we must enable our youth to interact more deeply and to discover creative ways of using virtual spaces for ecumenical formation.

20. The time has come, when we must not only open opportunities to young people for their ecumenical growth and leadership, but where we must learn from the innovative and dynamic models of ecumenical relationships that youth can teach us. As an ecumenical and

intergenerational family, we need to humble ourselves and to listen to young people. It was with young people that the ecumenical movement was born. It is young people's passion and insight today that will ensure the relevance and vitality of it. Without young people our ecumenical family is incomplete. At this time we need to nurture meaningful relationships and shared leadership between the generations. Young people need to know that they are important partners and that we are open to learning from their ecumenical experience.

21. They can help all of us to understand better where we are going and what kind of response is required of us. It is young people today who increasingly have little patience with the divisions among us and who reach out to others with similar values. There is a widespread hunger for spirituality in young people, even though there may be a rejection of church structures. Out of desperation, one of my colleagues enlisted her 22-year-old daughter to format the *mutirão* schedule over last Christmas. When she finished the tedious work with excel spreadsheets, she said excitedly to her mother, "I want to come to this assembly. The workshops are so diverse and so interesting – I had no idea that this was what ecumenism is all about. It makes me want to get involved." The issues that engage the ecumenical movement today are the issues which attract young people. But they need to be invited in. And they need to be equipped and supported to participate.

22. We hope that this assembly is a wonderful experience of ecumenical formation for the participants – both the young and the "formerly young" – and that it becomes a part of our ongoing life. The *feita da vida*, the feast of life, is a call to young people. The *feita da vida* is an open feast, but sometimes participating in an open feast means that others must step back. I challenge all of you church leaders here at the assembly to look at ways that your young people can participate. I call on all of us – ecumenical organizations, denominational structures, international and regional ecumenical bodies – to commit ourselves to youth. We have tried very hard to make this a youth assembly, but we have only partly succeeded. It needs the will and commitment of all of us.

Working for transformative justice

23. It is in Jesus Christ that God's loving grace transforms the world from within. Christ became flesh, lived among us and shared human suffering and joy (John 1:14). In Christ we have all received "from God's full store grace upon grace" (John 1:16). In him and through him all were created and all are called together in unity, in justice and peace. In him, all are to be reconciled, transformed, transfigured and saved (Col 1:15-23): a new humanity and a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1). The whole world is filled with God's grace in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

24. The assembly theme is an invitation to look at the world as a place loved by God and permeated by God's grace. Such emphasis on God's transformative grace corresponds to a

new emphasis on transformative justice in our work for change and transformation. Seen with the eyes of faith, we ourselves, and this world, can and must be transformed.

25. God has given us the gift of life and we have abused it. Human greed and thirst for power have created structures that cause people to live in poverty and systematically undermine the basis of life. Our very climate is in jeopardy. In an era when there is more than enough food to go around many times over, 852 million people across the world are hungry, up from 842 million in 2003. Every single day, 25,000 people are killed by hunger. Every day, more than 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes – one every five seconds. Threats to life – here in Latin America and in the world – abound. Globalization both brings us closer together than ever before – and exacerbates disparities of power and wealth. Violence continues to cause untold suffering – violence in the homes, on our streets, in our countries, sometimes even in our churches. Asymmetries of power are manifest in a thousand ways – between people, between communities, between countries. The litany of sins and suffering could go on and on.

26. Something is gravely wrong when at the beginning of the 21st century, the wealth of the three richest individuals on earth surpasses the combined annual GDP of the 48 least developed countries. Political arguments and economic rationalizations cannot counter the basic immorality of a world with this degree of inequality.

27. Something is gravely wrong in the world when there is still a real risk that nuclear weapons will be used in our lifetimes. Nuclear proliferation is an outrage to all humanity. The recent reports of countries acquiring nuclear weapons technology is frightening. But it is equally a scandal that countries which possess vast arsenals of nuclear weapons are unwilling to renounce their use.

28. Something is horribly wrong when children are sold into prostitution, when babies are aborted because they are girls, and when people of a certain ethnicity or race or caste continue to be oppressed. We need to be spiritually centred to confront such realities.

29. As churches, we are called to plan together, to speak together and to take action together in the face of conditions that we know to be wrong in this world.

30. A belief in God's call for abundant life means, first and foremost, affirming human dignity and the right of the poor to liberate themselves from unjust conditions. The struggle for life must be rooted in the experiences and the actions of those who are oppressed and excluded. When the poor as social actors begin to disappear behind "poverty" as defined by the statistics of the international financial institutions, our whole understanding changes. Poverty becomes an abstract term, divorced from the reality of what it means to be people who are poor. We must struggle to hold up the voices of the poor, to recognize them as actors in their own struggles, and to continually strive to enable them to advocate on their own behalf, to tell their own stories in their own language.

31. The *fešta da vida* – the feast of life – is not a party. It is a celebration of life, which will sometimes be painful. The *fešta da vida* invites you all into the household of God, to experience the pain and the suffering of others, and to feel yourself a part of the fragile and imperfect community of humanity. The vision of Christians gathered around a table in celebration recalls the gospel accounts of the last supper. There the people of God received God's gifts directly from the hands of Jesus, sharing one loaf and one cup. This is the source of our eucharistic vision, an occasion for joy.

32. And yet at the very same time, the disciples sensed that something was amiss. There was a failure of mutual trust, a prophecy of betrayal, a conviction that something was terribly wrong. When Jesus confirmed that one of them would betray him, the response on the lips of each was, "Is it I, Lord?" And this question was not directly answered – for even though eleven of the twelve would not betray him, all would deny him. In today's world, we find that our celebration of being together is also marked by contradictions, by a lack of mutual trust, by failure to live up to the Gospel call.

Is it I, Lord? Is it we? Teach us to pray "God, in your grace, transform the world."

33. As part of humanity we must constantly ask why the world is in such a mess. Too often we have been silent or too quick to blame others, while failing to recognize our own responsibility to each other. We need to move from resignation to indignation to righteous anger in confronting these life-denying forces.

34. If we are to transform the world, we have to change our paradigms. For example, it is common practice these days to talk about the United States as the world's sole superpower. And yet we know that the powers of this world and the empires they form come and go in history. At the end, the Bible tells us, they are built on feet of clay. They are vulnerable in many ways. How can we talk of any country as a superpower when the government cannot protect its people from terrorism, from natural disasters, from preventable diseases? Our conceptual tools are inadequate to understand the ambiguities of power. As we are recognizing, power is not only expressed in different forms of empire. The rapid development of newly emerging technologies is a very powerful tool with great potential impact on people and nature.

35. When there are such enormous inequalities and unequal access to different means of power, it counts in what part of the world one lives. Our churches and the stance they take on matters of economic justice and many other ethical challenges often reflect the realities surrounding them and impacting on the lives of their members. Some churches tend to see the present phase of economic globalization as the continuation of 500 years of oppression through colonialism and changing empires. Others emphasize change and discontinuity based on their experience of the rapidly changing political landscape. These different per-

spectives cannot be easily reconciled. We need to continue wrestling with these tensions because they help us to see the realities surrounding us more clearly and to identify the different entry points for both, advocacy and dialogue.

36. At this assembly we are celebrating the mid-term of the Decade to Overcome Violence. The goal of DOV is not so much to eradicate violence as it is to overcome the spirit, the logic and the practice of violence by actively seeking reconciliation and peace. This is an ecumenical task – because, as we are learning, preventing violence cannot be accomplished by any one particular group. Preventing and overcoming violence must be done collaboratively by churches together, and jointly in cooperation with governmental and civic institutions and people's grassroots initiatives.

37. In the second half of the Decade, several issues must be considered if we want to remain both realistic and hopeful.

38. Firstly, globalization is a reality on every level, not just economic. Terrorism appears to be globally networked, as is the war on terrorism. The consequences of this affect people in their activities and dignity almost everywhere. We must, therefore, take globalization and its many implications into consideration as we plan our common actions towards proclaiming the good news of peace.

39. Secondly, interfaith dialogue and cooperation is significant and imperative in the process towards overcoming violence, seeking peace and promoting reconciliation. Churches and religious people of all walks of faith recognize the imperative of interfaith action in response to the pressing needs and concerns of the societies in which they live. More and more people see interfaith action as an integral part of the ecumenical task. The vision of many today is that God's oikoumene includes not just Christians, but people of all living faiths.

40. Dialogue is often called upon to assist in resolving many ongoing conflicts that seem to be framed by religious language or have religious overtones. However, contacts between people of different faiths built quietly by patient dialogue during peacetime may in times of conflict prevent religion from being used as a weapon. Contacts across communal divides may prove to be the most precious tool in the construction of peace.

41. Thirdly, spirituality contributes crucially to overcoming violence and building peace. I believe that prayer and contemplation together form the foremost discipline for overcoming violence. The joint exercise of that spiritual discipline is an ongoing challenge for our fellowship. We must make space for this exercise to inspire and shape our individual and joint actions.

42. Within this dimension of spirituality, I am grateful to our Orthodox brothers and sisters in helping the ecumenical movement to recognize the dimension of the earth and nature more consistently. Our spirituality is robbed of a crucial dimension if it does not include our

being part of creation as well as co-creators in an intimate relationship with God's earth and all that fills it.

43. The theme of the 9th Assembly – God, in your grace, transform the world, reminds me very much of the theme of the 1st Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam: *Man's disorder and God's design*. The theme of the Amsterdam Assembly reflected both the violent past and the new hopes of the time. The colonial conquest of European nations had reached into the most distant corner of the world, epitomized by the British Empire where the sun never set. European nations themselves had turned against each other in violence in the so-called World Wars I and II. With the development and use of the atomic bomb, humanity had acquired the terrible capacity to destroy life on this planet. The vital question of the new era was whether God's design of the web of life of a transformed world would mark the future or whether human disorder where life is threatened and millions suffer would prevail.

44. The Amsterdam Assembly dared to speak of "God's design." This was an ethical statement par excellence in such troubled times. The theme reminded the churches and the world that when God created the world, the world was good. There was reason to become engaged for justice and peace. There was reason to work for a responsible society despite human sin and the quest for power. There was not only the hope, but also the ethical imperative for a new United Nations to provide a basis for peace, human rights and development for all.

45. The theme of the Amsterdam Assembly reflected a certain optimism that responsible leadership mindful of God's design would correct the disorder of human societies. Somehow the basic assumption of the Christendom era that progress in history would lead by itself to a world united by a powerful Christian civilization was not yet broken. Such optimism – often unaware of its contextual origins in Europe and North America and its colonial and imperial connotations – was fuelled by the rapid development of new technologies as the cutting edge of economic, political and military power.

46. Just as in Amsterdam, we too are on the threshold of a new era, conscious of the enormous gap between God's will for humanity and the present reality. In the run-up to the Amsterdam Assembly, the world stood on the brink of a human-generated disaster; in the run-up to the Porto Alegre Assembly, the world stands on the brink of seemingly natural disasters. According to God's design nature has an in-built self-regulatory capacity and cannot destroy the earth's entire life. But, driven by insatiable greed for self-aggrandizement, human beings have interfered with God's designed natural order to such an extent as to induce natural disasters capable of annihilating all life, including humankind.

47. Today we have become much more aware that the crisis we are confronted with goes much deeper and manifests itself beyond injustice and war among human beings, but affects all life. In particular, I point to the challenge to this planet and its inhabitants of climate

change. Just as atomic weapons changed the very way we thought about life, so too the potential of major climatic changes put life as we know it in danger.

48. Climate change is, arguably, the most severe threat confronting humanity today. This is not an issue for the future: severe consequences are already being experienced by millions of people. We can prevent catastrophic climate change – at least, we know enough to reduce the degree of human-induced climate change – if we find effective ways of combining the voice of the churches with others who can make a difference. We must call on all Christian churches to speak to the world with one voice on addressing the threat of climate change.

49. This divided world needs a church living as one body of Christ. Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said “apartheid is too strong for a divided church.” I say that this planet, where life is threatened, needs a church which lives unity in diversity as a sign and foretaste of the community of life that God wants to be – God’s household of life, the inhabited earth, the *oikoumene*. Even though our differences may at times divide us, deep in our hearts we know very well that we belong to each other. Christ wants us to be one. We are created one humanity and one earth community by the grace of God.

Focus on Africa

50. Together with the Decade to Overcome Violence, the Africa Focus was a major mandate from the 8th Assembly. In response to the call from the African plenary at the Harare Assembly, the WCC committed itself to accompany the churches and the people of Africa on their journey of hope for a better Africa. In the intervening years the Ecumenical Focus on Africa provided the framework for coordinated programmatic work in the areas of women and youth, peace-building, governance and human rights, reconstruction, HIV and AIDS, people with disabilities, theological education and ecumenical formation, inter-religious relations, church and ecumenical relations and economic justice. (The full account is found in the official report *From Harare to Porto Alegre*.) In our ecumenical engagement with Africa in these last seven years, we have also learnt to listen to the African churches and to the people of Africa concerning the continent’s situation: pain and cries as well as joy and hope.

51. The insights gained from our experience with the Ecumenical Focus on Africa suggest that overcoming poverty in Africa, which should be a high priority in our future ecumenical accompaniment, will require addressing two root causes: one systemic and structural, the other ethical and political in nature. On the systemic level, there are four factors that combine to militate against food sufficiency, which is a prerequisite to overcoming poverty. The economic policies which are unfavourable to investment in agriculture and rural community development. Rural-urban migration continues to empty rural areas of educated and able-bodied young people who contribute the core of human resources for rural transformation.

The third factor is violence. This includes civil war and senseless inter-personal violence at the domestic and community level. The fourth and most recent is HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. For aid to make a dent on poverty in Africa it must be an integral part, and not given in isolation, of a holistic and comprehensive approach addressing all those factors.

52. It is possible to formulate and have in place good policies for development. It is also possible to increase foreign financial aid to Africa. It is also possible to provide mechanisms for good governance. But the experience so far has shown that overcoming poverty and achieving social transformation is more than a mechanical approach to sustainable development. A vital ingredient that lacks is the moral will on the part of African leadership. Far too long African leaders have accepted the unacceptable and tolerated the intolerable.

53. Progressively, Afro-pessimism is being replaced by guarded optimism on the part of African churches and African people. The transformation from the Organization for African Unity to the African Union, the creation of new partnerships in Africa's development, the ongoing transforming of the All Africa Conference of Churches into a strategic ecumenical instrument, peace initiatives of women in Sierra Leone and Sudan and the recent election of the first woman president in Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as President of Liberia, are signs of hope. In the last seven years, most of the African countries have moved from one-party dictatorships to parliamentary democracies.

54. But, in the final analysis, Africa remains a paradoxical continent: Africa is extremely rich yet full of extremely poor people. Certainly, the outside world, the ecumenical movement included, has accompanied Africa in many and diverse ways. One of them is by providing aid. In the last thirty years a staggering \$330 billion have been poured into Africa. So why is Africa in its present predicament? This one thing we have observed: financial aid alone is not the answer to overcoming poverty in Africa; it is too easily misconceived, misdirected, misregulated or misapplied. It will take a level and depth of anger, indeed of righteous indignation, similar to that which produced the spirit of Pan-Africanism in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, to overcome poverty in Africa. The Africans on the continent and the African diaspora will have to come together again under the rubric of a kind of *global Africana* and say: it cannot go on like this because what is at stake is the core of what it means to be African – the African soul! And that requires more than material aid to recover.

It's all about relationships

55. Why is it so difficult to overcome what separates us? Why do we fall still short in our relationships with other human beings despite the technological advances of our age that defy imagination? It is incredible to think of our ability to manipulate genes and to send rockets to the far edges of our solar system – while we are still engaged in wars.

56. There is a common element in the social, economic and environmental threats to life we are confronted with and the ambiguous experience of growing inter-dependence that provokes greater fragmentation and enmity instead of better co-operation. Those whose power strives on our fears and anxieties exploit this situation. Fears and anxieties prevent us from a common witness. They pit us against each other, undermine our trust and confidence in each other, and force us to become defensive and reactive to the realities that surround us.

57. The biggest challenges that we face today, it seems to me, all converge at their roots in the lack of human capacity to relate to each other, to creation, and to God as we ought to. Whether we talk about our social realities, issues of power and politics, and even about the realities within and among the churches, we can see that the quality of our relationships has suffered considerably not just today, but for decades and centuries.

58. We live in a diverse world – a world of ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural and religious differences. The migration of people has meant that almost all of our societies have become multi-cultural. And yet our capacity to relate to the other is sadly limited. We lash out and accuse those who are different from us. We are too often fearful of newcomers. We draw lines between ourselves and others in ways that are hurtful. Racism continues to rear its ugly head; xenophobia and Islam-phobia spread to more and more places; anti-Semitism has revived where it was expected to have died years ago. And yet the commonalities that unite us are far greater than those that divide us. We are all capable of love, we all revere our families, we all depend on the environment, we all have a vested interest in making this planet a loving and hospitable place.

59. If we focus on our capacity to relate to each other, to creation and to God, we realize that our ethical challenges have a profoundly spiritual dimension and vice versa. We can no longer separate ethics and ecclesiology, the search for unity of the church and the unity of humankind. They are closely intertwined with each other. What aggravates our divisions and the inequality among us and what can contribute to healing and reconciliation, has, indeed, a common centre.

60. This should not surprise us. The reality of sin reflects the reality of broken relationships with God, the fellow human being and creation. Sin – so teaches the Bible – is first and foremost a matter of broken relationships in all of these three dimensions of our existence. Sin is real. Sin has its social and practical expressions, which breed death instead of life and undermine our fellowship. It is this reality that is directly targeted, redeemed, and transformed by God's grace. Taking the toll of human sin on himself in his death on the cross, Christ restores life and heals and reconciles relationships distorted by sin. We celebrate this mystery of life renewed in Christ in the eucharist that transforms us as members of the one body of Christ. In our daily lives, this liturgy of the eucharist continues in the healing of relationships, in sharing life with life.

61. The life that God gives us and that sustains us, all of us, is the food that creates a new community of sharing, a community justified and reconciled with God by God's grace. The *feita da vida* is an open feast. It welcomes those who come and it builds community through relationships. For Christians, the *Agape* – the fellowship meal that often follows the eucharistic service – is a celebration of this community. It too anticipates the Kingdom which is to come.

62. We will be best equipped to promote human relationships in the world around us if as churches we shall learn how to share with one another all the gifts of grace which we have received from God. To a very large extent our disunity as churches is due to our incapacity to practise this genuine sharing of gifts. One way of enriching our fellowship of sharing is by transforming the way we relate to each other as churches and as ecumenical organizations – a kind of horizontal sharing of the gifts of grace. Today more than ever before we need each other as churches. We must find new ways of deepening our fellowship as churches within the WCC fellowship. A new paradigm of being church to each other is an imperative in the 21st century work on ecumenical and ecclesial relationships. This is needed for the churches' self-empowerment, not for their own sake, but for the sake of each other and in order to gain the capacity to contribute to the world in dire need of learning to build better ways of relating. But as churches we can also learn from many communities that have developed ways of sharing the richness of who they are in spite of what they are.

63. During my travels to different regions of this world, I have seen that in many places worship continues in a common *Agape* meal – a celebration of shared life for all. I remember poor Indigenous women in Bolivia sharing the little they had after worship and creating a festive meal for everybody on the basis of the different varieties of potatoes they had brought to church. There, in that deprived community, the communal joy radiated as life met life in earnest. By sharing the little each had, the women did not become poorer than they had been; rather, they each became happier for each other because none went back home hungry. The miracle of feeding five thousand (without counting women and children!) is a reality on a daily basis among the poor. That is how they still survive in this otherwise cruel and merciless world.

64. Carnival here in Brazil is exactly such a sprawling and over-abundant celebration of life against a backdrop of poverty and marginalization. Poor communities continue to nurture the creativity and capacity to celebrate life together in the midst of the destitute and desperate situation that confronts them. Such celebrations of life among the poor remind me also of all the other parables of the invitation to the festive table that are told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in various ways. They all have in common that the host is deeply disappointed by the negative response of those invited in the first place. In an act of transformative justice, he extends the invitation to those from the streets and the fences at the mar-

gins of society. Jesus' sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth speaks to their lives: the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18f). They want to celebrate the new, empowered community in Christ by worshipping together in song and prayer. They want to experience the healing power of the Gospel in their daily lives. And this is for sure: they will celebrate with God when the usual patterns of exclusion and marginalization are turned upside down!

65. The *festa da vida* invites us to look afresh at the quality of our relationships and to put these relationships in the centre of the ecumenical movement.

66. The Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) policy statement adopted at the Harare Assembly called on WCC and its members to deepen their relationships with one another. To some extent, this has taken place, as in the important work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. Pastoral visits and "living letters" have offered churches the opportunity to express solidarity and compassion with one another in different difficult situations. We need to deepen our mutual accountability to one another, and do it in concrete and visible ways.

67. The CUV also recognized that the ecumenical movement is broader than the World Council of Churches and called on WCC to develop its relationships with other Christian bodies, notably the evangelical and Pentecostal churches and other ecumenical organizations.

68. Our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church has matured over the years. The WCC and the Roman Catholic Church are very different bodies, but both are deeply committed to the ecumenical enterprise. For the last forty years we have worked together fruitfully through the Joint Working Group. The WCC is grateful for the direct involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in our work to overcome the theological, historical and social divisions among the churches; in mission; in theological education; in the witness for justice in our world; in inter-religious dialogue; and in other ways.

69. Perhaps sometimes there have been unrealistic expectations – and that on both sides. But we have always had the will to clarify the issues, in order to resume a common search for the *kind* of unity which is Christ's will for his church.

70. There is a natural tension between efforts towards deepening and those towards widening, the fellowship of the churches constituting the World Council. This assembly gives an opportunity to re-focus attention on the quality of relationships within the fellowship, to explore together what it means to be in fellowship towards greater unity, and to challenge one another to manifest that unity more deeply. The assembly also gives us the opportunity to reaffirm our readiness to widen this fellowship through dialogue, inter-action and cooperation with sisters and brothers in Christ beyond the intimate circle of membership in the World Council of Churches. One concrete example is that of the Global Christian Forum,

which brings together followers of Jesus Christ from a broader range of traditions and expressions than has ever been seen. The World Council of Churches is pledged to do everything in our power to continue to facilitate this process which, so far, has been very encouraging.

71. There is, as we know, a natural tension between the various institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement. All ecumenical organizations are struggling today with the question of how to respond to the changing ecclesial and ecumenical landscape. This is why we have begun to address together the major challenges to ecumenism in the 21st century – a process that goes beyond a narrow institutional focus that the term “re-configuration” might suggest. There is the constant need for spelling out together the theological and spiritual basis of our common ecumenical commitment. Just as there is the urgent need to work out mechanisms for coordinating our ecumenical response to diakonia, advocacy and development. Many actors in the ecumenical movement underline the need for defining together the common ecumenical vision and not only “the common vision of the WCC”. I expect that this assembly will affirm the Council’s role within the one ecumenical movement and encourage the Council to become the leading force, the facilitating agent for this important ecumenical task in serving the ecumenical movement of the 21st century.

72. In addition, there is some tension in regard to inter-religious relationships. Many ask if this is integral to the ecumenical quest for Christian unity. We all recognize that we live in a multi-faith world, and we need to learn more about relating to people of other faiths, particularly at the community level. Beyond that, in addressing a broad range of world issues – and not just those involving conflicts between peoples of different religions – we need to learn how to relate, learn about the ways people of other faiths believe and see the world, and learn to act together for the good of our communities and of the world. Religion is increasingly recognized as playing a major role in international affairs, and we need to build relationships with other faith communities on all levels. This was affirmed by the Critical Moment on Religious Dialogue Conference which the Council organized last June. The meeting brought together participants from all major world religions in all parts of the world. One of the main conference recommendations was to call on the WCC to put in place mechanisms for bringing world religious leaders to address together the problems facing the human community today. Inter-religious relationships should be given a high priority in the next period, and we look up to this assembly to advise on best ways of achieving this objective.

73. The *festa da vida*, to which we are all invited, is also an invitation to reach out to those we know and to those whom we don’t yet know.

74. We have long recognized that all of WCC’s programmatic work is grounded in relationships and yet the reality is that different staff or teams are responsible for programme and

for relationships. In our work after this assembly, I hope for a more integrated and interactive approach to programme and relationships where our programmes strengthen the quality of our relationships and where our constituency feels more ownership of the programmes. The significance of this deep inter-relatedness was emphasized by the main findings of the Pre-Assembly Evaluation Report.

Creative ways of working

75. As we begin this assembly, I hope and pray that we celebrate this extraordinary opportunity given to us as a moment of sharing with each other what we bring to this place and celebrating together a *fiesta of life*. We hope that the assembly plenaries, the series of ecumenical conversations and *mutirão* events will help us to identify the main challenges and priorities the churches should address worldwide through their common instrument, which is the World Council of Churches. We hope that the Programme Guidelines Committee will arrive at a relevant and workable agenda for transformation and that the Policy Reference Committee will move our relationships forward. And we hope that the Finance Committee will offer practical advice on how to develop a concept of dynamic stewardship which undergirds the management of our financial, human and physical resources as an integral part of the Council's overall work. Beyond that, we will focus on adopting a plan of work and programme for ecumenical spirituality that will be inspired and strengthened by our common commitment to praying together and fully owned and implemented by member churches. Several pre-assembly events have already highlighted the contributions of those often on the periphery of the ecumenical movement: youth, Indigenous Peoples, dalits, women, and people with disabilities. Their challenge and perspectives continue to be an important entry point not just for critique of injustice and exclusion but for new and creative understandings of transformation. The fact that we are meeting in Latin America will shape our discussions and we look forward to deepening our understanding of this continent through the Latin American celebration and plenary.

76. In what has been described as “the information age”, our ecumenical movement is challenged to proclaim God's eternal Word and interpret its meaning across a wide range of cultures and technologies. As we seek creative ways to communicate, we remain committed to telling the love of Jesus, building trust and supporting the growth of base communities – both actual and virtual – in which spiritual fellowship may mature and lives may be transformed.

77. The present context challenges us to re-think the following four current emphases of the ecumenical movement. They should not be seen as a proposal of a new WCC programme structure because there are many different ways of dealing with them.

78. *Faith and spirituality*: The central question of our time, as I have indicated in my remarks, is the question of faith and the presence of Christ in the other. This is at the basis of our

understanding of unity and mission. Faith must be central to our life together and must be the foundation for our ecumenical vision and engagement. How do we make visible and effective the unity which is given us in Christ?

79. What does Christian faith in the 21st century entail? This question is relevant to the Northern and Eastern churches as well as to the churches in the global South. It is no longer a realistic expectation that Christian faith formation takes place in the Christian families, in the churches and Sunday schools, and in the schools or even in the society at large. Deliberate efforts must be made to ensure that basic facts about the Christian faith are understood by those who confess Christianity. However, it is also necessary to understand the emerging Christendom in the 21st century because Southern Christianity is not just a transplant of Christendom of yester-centuries. New expressions of non-denominationalism and post-denominationalism are increasing in all parts of the world. Our Christian self-understanding in an increasingly multi-faith society will gain greater currency in the next period. What all this challenges us to do is to see our faith in a radically new perspective. This we could do if we considered Christianity as a global reality, i.e. seeing it with new eyes and not just with the eyes of one particular region or theological perspective. What must be our theological response to the poverty and deprivation of so many, to the affluence of others, and to the link between the two? All these phenomena have implications for the way we do and teach theology, how we do mission, and how we witness in the 21st century.

80. At a time when issues of identity characterize political, social and interpersonal relationships, dialogue and cooperation between faiths become even more imperative. The more firmly we are grounded in our Christian faith, and the more we speak with one voice, the more effective we shall become as participants at the table of inter-religious dialogue.

81. *Ecumenical formation*: This is one of those areas that surfaces forcefully, not merely as need or priority but as a real ecumenical imperative, as a determining factor that can have decisive influence on the ecumenical movement throughout the 21st century.

82. In many member churches, a new generation of leadership – though committed to ecumenical principles – seems not to be fully informed about the rich legacy and experience of the modern ecumenical movement. In this crucial moment of generational transition, leadership should be given the opportunity to profit from this body of knowledge and wisdom.

83. If contemporary Christians, including church leadership and staff, are to participate creatively and responsibly in the search for unity, and grow together, appropriate means of ecumenical formation must be offered to enable better, richer contributions to our common life. We must bring together human resources and educational materials, from the churches and from ecumenical organizations.

84. If we look at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, a model for ecumenical formation, we may discover two further challenges. First, in recent years, evangelicals and

Pentecostals have been manifesting a clear interest in ecumenical courses and seminars, including programmes of graduate study. Second, young people have been pressing for more inter-religious encounters and seminars. Both these trends are suggestive of the way forward, and a cause for hope.

85. *Transformative Justice*: In response to those who suffer the consequences of injustice that splits the world along the lines of poverty and wealth, work in the area of transformative justice is needed which integrates the care of creation, the transformation of unjust economic and social structures, a clear prophetic voice in global advocacy and prophetic diakonia.

86. In the period since Harare, WCC has explored the concept of transformative justice particularly in the area of overcoming racism. Instead of the more commonly used “restorative justice”, the concept of transformative justice is based on the understanding that it is not possible to simply reinstate, re-establish, bring back, return – what has been lost. Centuries of injustice in any form cannot be erased – either historically, collectively or individually. People’s lives and cultures, languages, lifestyles, worship and spirituality cannot again be as they were. Transformative justice deals with the past in the present. Its goal is to overcome oppression and domination so as to achieve healing, reconciliation and the re-establishment (“to put things right”) of people’s relationships.

87. My vision for the future is that we will explore this further as we continue to address issues of justice and diakonia, advocacy and dialogue. This will require creative new ways of addressing how the church’s mission history has sometimes been interwoven with the breaking down of traditional forms of healing and reconciliation. It will include more direct processes of liberation and healing through encounter and dialogue between perpetrators of injustice and those who are victimized.

88. This calls for a paradigm shift in our work, for metanoia, that will allow structures, culture, and defining values to be transformed. It will require us to re-direct our programmes towards more intentionally building truly inclusive and just communities which safeguard diversity, where different identities and unity interact, and where the rights and obligations of all are fully respected in love and fellowship. Transformative justice calls on the churches to make a costly commitment to overcome the divisions within their own life – our communities need to be transformed to fully live the diversity of their peoples and cultures as a clear reflection of God’s creation and image in humankind. To be the church today is to be healing, reconciled and reconciling communities.

89. *Being a moral voice to the world*: With growing recognition of the role of religion in public life, we have new opportunities to influence decisions on global policies. This changing context with a renewed emphasis on the role of religion introduces new perspectives in dealing with issues of the churches’ social responsibility.

90. In fulfilling our historic responsibility we are challenged to become a strong, credible moral voice to the world: A voice that is grounded in spirituality, and therefore is distinguished and distinguishable from the many competing voices in a world where ethical values are too often found wanting.

91. All these are common concerns for member churches and ecumenical partners. I hope that in the future we can develop fresh and creative ways of working which strengthen our relationships with churches and a wide range of ecumenical partners. These ways will take different forms with different partners. For example, I would like to see an interaction with Christian World Communions, especially those whose membership largely overlaps with the membership of the WCC, in our common commitment to visible unity and our common readiness to develop relationships with those churches and Christian families that do not actively participate in the ecumenical movement. I would like to see a closer programmatic relationship between WCC and the regional ecumenical organizations, which builds on our respective strengths and constituencies. I would like to see more intentional collaboration with the international ecumenical organizations, which are often working on the same issues. I hope that initiatives to develop new ways of working in the field of development and diakonia with specialized ministries will bear fruit in the coming months and years. And as I have previously indicated, I hope that a renewed focus on ecumenical spirituality will transform the way we work.

92. But I want to go beyond these suggestions and renew the proposal that, as a concrete step, the next assembly of the WCC should provide a common platform for the wider ecumenical movement. If we are ready to take such a significant concrete step, we could envisage together, instead of the many different global assemblies and general conferences organized by the various world communions and other bodies, just one celebration of the search for unity and common witness of Christian churches. To be even more specific, and as a minimum next step, I propose that this assembly give us a mandate to accelerate the dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to explore possibilities of holding our next assemblies as a combined event. And we should also invite any other world Christian body to join us in this dialogue.

93. Such a proposal obviously requires careful consideration of many details. But I am fully convinced that we can do this, and that the ecumenical movement will be stronger with a common global platform. This could be a means of beginning to plan together, so that we may even more effectively speak and act together.

In closing...

94. Dear friends, sisters and brothers in Christ, the delegates to the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches are entrusted with a significant responsibility. It is a responsi-

bility alive with potential. In Porto Alegre we are challenged to face up to the sharp-edged realities of this world, and to discern the signs of the time. In the same moment, we are challenged to pray with all our hearts, "God, in your grace, transform the world!" And renewed through prayer, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we expect to be sent again from this place as messengers of God's grace and of God's will for the transformation of this world, as messengers of hope for our children, for our grandchildren, for the future.

95. The Word of God is a word of hope, the good news of transformation by grace. It is the proclamation of a new heaven and a new earth, where former things are no more. It is God's invitation to participate in *a festa da vida*, to rejoice in the feast of life!

96. In the course of this assembly, may God's Spirit spark an unquenchable flame of hope within our spirits, illuminating a creation restored to goodness, revealing us as God's children, members of the one human family and one earth community.

97. At this gathering, may God's Spirit kindle within us the deepest desire of our predecessors in the ecumenical movement, the conviction that there is and must be one church – holy, catholic and apostolic – the undivided body of Christ in service to the world, united at one table in the presence of our living Lord.

98. With God, all things are possible. And so we take up our responsibility, relying on God's transforming grace. All are welcome to the *festa da vida*; therefore, let us keep the feast!

REPORT OF THE MODERATOR

Aram I, Catholicos Of Cilicia

*His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, was Moderator of the WCC Central Committee
from 1991 to 2006*

1. Assemblies are important stages in our ecumenical journey. Through prayer, meditation, presentations, discussion and decision, they provide a proper framework to evaluate the World Council of Churches' ecumenical witness, identify its future priorities and set a new course. Assemblies are also unique occasions to deepen our fellowship "on the way" towards the visible unity of the church. This 9th Assembly takes place in a period of world history when values are in decline, visions are uncertain and hopes are confused; when injustice is spreading and peace is almost unattainable; when violence and insecurity are becoming dominant in all spheres of human life.

"God, In Your Grace, Transform The World"

2. In this turbulent world we turn to God and pray: "*God, in your grace, transform the world*": a supplication emanating from our broken hearts; a sign of hope emerging in the midst of the uncertainties of human life; a genuine expression of faith unfolding in the context of the tensions and anxieties of the world.

3. Grace (in Hebrew *Q'en* and in Greek *Xaris*) is the core of God's revelation. It appears in the Bible with multi-faceted meanings and manifold implications. Grace is benevolence, compassion, love, mercy, gift, and beauty manifested through God's "manifold gifts" (1 Pet. 4: 10) and "gracious deeds" (Is. 63: 7-9). St. Paul's letters are rightly described as the basis of the theology of grace. In the Bible, grace displays the following basic features: a) It is God's gift of the "fullness" of life (Jn. 10:10). It is also a quality of life sustained by obedient response to God. b) Grace is the concrete expression of God's love (2 Cor. 12:7-10), which makes the human being strong even in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). c) It is God's transformative power that restores his image in human beings. d) As God's essential attribute, grace pertains both to his transcendence and immanence. God has communicated and shared his grace with us; he came to us "full of grace" and "dwelt among us" (Jn. 1: 14-16). e) Grace is God's victory over sin (Rm. 5: 21). Salvation of humanity and creation is the fruit of God's intervention in Christ (Rm. 3:24). f) Grace is God's gift of justice and peace, namely, the expression of God's mercy and love towards humanity and his commitment to the

covenant. g) The grace of God is his reconciliation in Christ with humanity (2 Cor. 5: 17–21). Reconciliation is healing and transformation of humanity and the creation realised by God's *Kenosis* in Christ (Col. 1: 19-20). h) God's grace is the coming of the kingdom of heaven on earth manifested in and through Christ. God's Kingdom is the reign of grace. i) Grace has replaced the law. It is God's free gift (Rm. 3: 24) given to all without discrimination. However, God's preferential option is for the oppressed and marginalized (Mt. 5: 1-12).

4. The biblical perception of grace is dominant in Orthodox theology and spirituality. The following aspects capture our attention:

a) Grace aims at the renewal and transformation of the whole of humanity and creation; it is new creation. Grace as re-creation starts with the "microcosm", i.e. human beings and the human community. Humanity and creation are interconnected. The blessing of elements of creation (water, fruit, land etc.) in Orthodox churches indicates the integrity and sacredness of creation.

b) God's act of transformation has become a reality in the Christ-event. God's transformative presence with us is a continuous reality; it is both an event and a process, existential and eschatological. In the power of the Holy Spirit, God's grace becomes a living and life-giving reality in and through the eucharist.

c) The transformative action of God is Trinitarian: the love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Grace is God's all-embracing action; it permeates all dimensions and spheres of created order, which is referred to in Orthodox theology as the cosmic action of grace. Grace is God's omnipresent and omnipotent power; it transforms all aspects of human life. It comes through the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and ordination.

d) God's grace makes us all one body; it is the source of our unity in Christ and of our bond of unity with each other. In spite of worldly divisions, in the power of the Holy Spirit God's grace continuously ensures, undergirds and protects our unity, as well as the integrity and continuity of the church and leads it to *eschaton*, the second coming of Christ in glory.

e) God's grace creates communion between the human being and God. The human being is not only created by God, but also for God. The human being is co-worker (1 Cor. 3: 9) with God and the guardian of his creation. The human stewardship of the creation and accountability to God are expressed through the humanity-God communion that reaches its culmination in *theosis*.

f) Accepting God's grace means sharing it with others through evangelism and diakonia. This is "liturgy after liturgy". Responding to God's grace in gratitude and faithfulness is costly; it implies *Kenosis*, namely, *martyria* in life and even in death.

5. Strenuous efforts have been made in history to transform the world. All political, religious, economic, ideological and technological attempts have failed. With its new value-sys-

tem, paradigms and powerful forces, globalization is yet another attempt to transform the world. As Christians, we believe that only God's grace can empower, renew and transform humanity and creation. In this Assembly, we will identify the implications of this theme to the ecumenical movement and particularly to the ecumenical witness of the World Council of Churches by reflecting and praying: "*God, in your grace, transform the world*". Indeed, this prayer is the cry of the poor for justice; the cry of the sick for healing; the cry of the marginalized for liberation; the cry of humanity and creation for reconciliation. Empowered with the grace of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 13: 11; Jn. 16: 13), the church as transformed and transforming community is called to be Christ's witness to the end of the world, until in Christ all things are reconciled and the whole of creation is transformed into a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Latin American Context

6. This is the first assembly of the WCC to take place in Latin America. With its struggle and hope for justice and dignity, this continent will, undoubtedly, have strong impact on our deliberations and actions.

7. Latin American societies have suffered from their colonial origins. European societies, mainly Spain and Portugal, imposed their social and political systems and cultural values on the aboriginal peoples, thus destroying their cultures and religions. The coloniser's oppressive rule and culture left deep scars on the Latin-American societies. The poverty, inequalities and foreign dependence, continued after the transition from the colonial period to the era of independence.

8. Today, although Latin American societies differ from one another in many ways, they also share a great deal. Most of them were affected by political, economic and social turmoil throughout the 20th Century. By the middle 1970's, many Latin American countries were ruled by military regimes, which violated human rights, persecuted and assassinated political and community leaders and outlawed political organisations. Since the 1980's, most governments of the region have adopted economic strategies that were inspired or based on neo-liberal principles and doctrines. For the last ten years, most countries in the region have suffered severe economic and political crises, which in turn have brought about social unrest and protests. Throughout this period, the Latin American people have struggled for life, dignity and human rights. Globalization has dramatically impacted the political, social and cultural aspects of the societies in the region. Because of globalization, local people have lost control over their national resources and economic activities, and the gap between rich and poor people has widened. Recently, several countries have elected governments committed to development strategies that are at odds with the policies of international institutions (IMF, World Bank, etc.).

9. Many churches have been and remain alert to these changes, developments and challenges. They believe that their pastoral and prophetic role is to participate actively in nation building. The churches' involvement in nation building has helped them to understand God's mission in a new context and in a new way. Faith is an essential reality in the daily life of the people of Latin America. Spirituality, evangelical zeal and ecumenical engagement are strong among the churches. The growth of non-institutional churches and charismatic movements is an important feature of Christianity in Latin America.

10. The Assembly theme has a special meaning at this moment in the history of this continent. Through the special session on Latin America, as well as through worship in local communities and daily contacts with the local churches and people, we will have the opportunity to learn more about the continent, in general, and Brazil, in particular.

A period of upheavals and tenacity

11. The last seven years have been a complex and fragile period of world history. The report *From Harare to Porto Alegre* (1998-2006) covers the major developments and significant aspects of the Council's witness during this period. It briefly outlines the achievements made and the lessons learned during the journey from the 8th to the 9th Assembly. Attached to the report, you also have in your files the *Pre-Assembly Programme Evaluation*, which is a critical, comprehensive and objective assessment of the Council's work in its various aspects and manifestations.

12. As we look at the period that is now behind us, we may rightly ask how much we have been able to move forward towards our ecumenical goals. Giving a full and exhaustive account about the journey of our fellowship is not easy, indeed. One of the words frequently used in recent years to depict the life and work of the Council is "crisis". We have gone through crises of various kinds. We have faced tremendous tensions and have carried on the Council's witness under enormous pressures. Great achievements are realised and major goals are attained through crises. Was not the incarnation of Christ due to a crisis? Was not the creation of the WCC a response to a crisis? Crises will always remain with the Council in different forms and ways. We are called to respond to crises in faith and hope and with a forward-looking vision.

13. The last seven years in the life of the Council was a period of upheaval and yet tenacity. The Council experienced the strong impact of global developments. In spite of the negative repercussions of these developments, the in-house mood of restlessness, due to a significant fall in income and the necessity of reducing programmes and staff and, in spite of the emergence of multiple concerns pertaining to Council-member churches relations, the Council largely realized the recommendations made and the programmatic priorities set by the Harare Assembly. The reflection and action of the Council were mainly organized around

four foci: being church, caring for life, ministry of reconciliation and common witness and service amidst globalization. Financial constraints, programme re-adjustments and changes in staff leadership did not hamper the quality of the Council's witness. Nor did they affect the morale and dedication of the staff. Guided by the Central and Executive Committees and supported by programme-related committees and commissions, the Council's staff performed their work well. They deserve our great appreciation.

14. An assembly is primarily an occasion for the Council to be accountable by assessing its achievements, failures and deficiencies. It is also an opportunity to take a broader and realistic look at the ecumenical movement, which the Council is called to serve. Indeed, such a serious attempt to analyze the ecumenical situation, spell out the emerging new realities and concerns, and identify new expressions and challenges of ecumenism will enable us to look forward with greater confidence and clear vision. In the last decade, the ecumenical movement has witnessed significant developments, which will undoubtedly become, with their broader ramifications and far-reaching consequences, crucial for the future course of ecumenism. I would like to focus my observations on three specific areas: ecclesiology, inter-religious dialogue, and new self-articulations of the ecumenical movement.

For a church beyond its walls

15. The ecumenical movement is about "being church". It will always remind the churches to fulfil their being and vocation in the context of changing times and circumstances. In my report to the Harare Assembly, I asked: "What kind of church do we project for the 21st century: a church confined to nation-states or ethnic groups and exclusively concerned with its self-perpetuation or a missionary church open to the world and ready to face the challenges of the world?".¹ Through its programmes, relations and activities, the Council continued to wrestle with this pertinent question. Our churches, too, each in their own way, grappled with this critical issue.

16. Mainstream Christianity is ageing and falling in number, and Christianity is re-emerging with new faces and forms. The formation of non-denominational congregations, para-church and mega-church organizations has dramatically changed the Christian panorama. Major changes are taking place also inside the churches: the institutional church is losing much of its strength and impact on society; tensions and divisions in many churches on ethical, social and pastoral issues are creating confusion and estrangement; the divide between "belonging" and "believing" is growing; and we hear more and more in the mass media about the church in "confusion", the "polarized" church and the "silent" church. Many people, particularly the youth, seem to be disappointed with what they perceive as the incapacity of the

¹ Aram I, *In a Search of Ecumenical Vision*, Antelias, 2000, p. 283.

institutional church to respond to the challenges and problems of new times. They are looking for a church that is capable of meeting their spiritual yearnings; a church that can serve their pastoral needs; a church that can provide answers to their questions.

17. These emerging trends urge the church to go beyond its institutional boundaries, to transcend its traditional forms and reach the people at the grass roots. For centuries, dogmatic, ethical, theological, ethnic, cultural and confessional walls have protected our churches. I wonder whether they can any longer defend the churches in a world where interaction and inter-penetration have become integral to human life. The church is exposed to all sorts of vicissitudes and upheavals of society. Some churches have reacted to this situation by withdrawing back into their national, confessional or institutional boundaries to preserve their specificity. In response to the changing environment, others are seeking new ways of "being church". The church can no longer stay inside the "fortress" as a self-contained reality; it must interact with its environment. The church cannot transform the world from 'inside the walls; it must reach out. In a new world context "being church" is, indeed, a great challenge with concrete implications:

- a) It means perceiving the church essentially as a missionary reality and not a frozen institution. The church acquires its authentic nature and full meaning when it fulfils itself as a mission. The church is sent out to the world to discern and respond to the will of God in the complexities and ambiguities of the world.
- b) It means going beyond itself, reaching out to the poor and outcast, sharing their concerns, identifying with their suffering, and meeting their needs. The church loses its credibility if it fails to interact with the people in the pews. It must become a "church for others", a church that empowers the marginalized.
- c) It means becoming a community of and for all; where all segments of society come together within the framework of a common life and decision-making, where the voices of women are heard, the participation of youth is encouraged, and expectations of differently-abled people are met; where, in fact, all forms of discrimination are destroyed.
- d) It means addressing issues related to bio-ethics, bio-technology, human sexuality and other areas of ethics and morality. The ecumenical debate has taught us that the church's being and unity are intimately related to ethics. The churches can no longer ignore these issues in intra-church and inter-church relations. Through pastoral and contextual approaches a common ground must be sought. Such an engagement will greatly help the churches avoid tensions and divisions.
- e) It means bringing healing and reconciliation to the broken humanity and creation. As God's transformed community, the foretaste and sign of the Kingdom, the church is sent by Christ to transform the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is mandated to exercise its responsible stewardship over the creation.

f) It means rediscovering the centrality of unity. A divided church cannot have a credible witness in a broken world; it cannot stand against the disintegrating and disorienting forces of globalization and enter into a meaningful dialogue with the world. Speaking with one voice and assuming together the church's prophetic vocation are, indeed, essential requirements of "being church" in a polarized world.

18. Today, new environments are being formed around the churches, calling on them to review and broaden the church's theological reflection; new ways of missionary outreach are emerging, challenging the churches to go beyond traditional norms of evangelism and diakonia; new ways of "being Christian" are being shaped, reminding the churches of the necessity to change their educational concepts and methodologies. Clearly, a self-sufficient and inward-looking church cannot survive in radically changing societies. Only a church liberated from its self-captivity, a church in creative dialogue with its environment, a church courageously facing the problems of its times, a church with the people and for the people, can become a living source of God's empowering, transforming and healing grace. I am not advocating for the church an uncritical openness to the world, but a dynamic and decisive move from self-centredness to dialogical interaction, from concern for self-perpetuation to missionary outreach, from reactive to proactive engagement, from self-protective to responsive action. "Being church" is an ecclesiological issue; it means going to the authentic roots of the church's catholicity, holiness, apostolicity and unity. "Being church" is a missiological issue; it means redefining and re-articulating the *esse* of church as a missionary reality. "Being church" is also an ecumenical issue; it means challenging and helping the church to become an efficient and credible instrument of God's transformation in a changing world. "Being church" must remain at the heart of the ecumenical movement.

Self-understanding in pluralist societies

19. Religious plurality constitutes the very context of "being church". Our theology, our traditions, our values, and our way of life are strongly influenced by our pluralist environment. The church is called to redefine its identity and missionary vocation in the midst of religious plurality. The church has always lived in dialogue with its milieu. Globalization has made dialogue even more existential and integral to the church's daily life. Dialogue is the commitment of living our diversities as one humanity, meaningfully and coherently in one world. It is also the attempt to work together, irrespective of our divergences and tensions. The following considerations merit special attention:

a) Christian self-understanding in the context of religious plurality is crucial. Phenomenological approaches to the question of identity in a globalized world and in pluralist societies are simply irrelevant. The new environment in which we live questions exclusivist, monological, and self-centred self-understanding, and calls for a dialogical self-defini-

tion. Although our identity is conditioned by our faith, it is tested by the specific environment in which it is experienced and articulated. This interactive perception of Christian identity in spite of its potential risks, enriches and broadens our self-understanding; it also affects the way we organise Christian education and formation.

b) This approach to Christian self-understanding also helps us to understand in the right perspective the “otherness” of the other who is no longer a stranger, but a neighbour. Globalization has transformed the dialogue with strangers into a dialogue of neighbours. As an expression of compassion and respect, dialogue with our neighbour is a vital dimension of biblical teachings. To discover the “other” is to rediscover oneself. But our understanding of the “other” should always be checked by the “other’s” self-understanding. Our perception of the “other” is also crucial for the church’s missiological self-understanding and self-fulfillment. The churches’ missionary outreach must not be perceived as a reaction “against” the stranger, but as a proactive engagement “with” our neighbour. Hence, we need to explore the meaning and implications of *Missio Dei* in the context of religious plurality.

c) Addressing religious plurality from a Christian perspective is always judgmental; it is based on our faith in Triune God and our commitment to *Missio Dei*. We must revisit the biblical theology and the Logos Christology of the early church, which help and remind us to look at the basics of our faith in a broader perspective. According to biblical teachings, God’s gift of salvation in Christ is offered to the whole humanity. Likewise, according to Christian pneumatology, the Holy Spirit’s work is cosmic; it reaches in mysterious ways to people of all faiths. Therefore, the church is called to discern the signs of the “hidden” Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions and in the world, and bear witness to God’s salvation in Christ.

d) In inter-religious dialogue our truth claims cannot be compromised. Affirming our faithfulness to Christ, however, must not preclude engaging in dialogue and collaboration with other religions. The specificity and integrity of each religion should be respected in dialogue. To make our dialogue credible and set it on a solid basis, we must deepen our common values and accept our differences. While the need for religions to speak together on issues of common concern from the perspective of common values is growing with acute urgency, the ambiguity of religion’s role in society and misuse of religion are ever increasing. The churches are caught in this dilemma. This ambivalent situation makes inter-religious dialogue even more imperative. The churches and the ecumenical movement must take most seriously the inter-religious dialogue.

For a relevant and credible ecumenism

20. We have entered a new period of ecumenical history. The ecumenical landscape is undergoing rapid and radical change: traditional ecumenical institutions are losing their motivation and interest; new ecumenical models and norms are emerging; new ecumenical alliances

and partnerships are being formed; and new ecumenical agendas are being set. The ecumenical panorama today presents a new picture. I want to identify some of these significant developments:

a) *People-centred ecumenism*. In the last decade, institutional ecumenism began to generate indifference and even alienation, and ecumenism, as a movement pertaining to the whole people of God, started to acquire predominance. Ecumenism is steadily coming out from the narrow confines of institution and even going beyond the churches. Ecumenism is marginal for some churches, while it appears as a top priority for ecumenical agencies and action groups. Grassroots ecumenism is gaining more attraction in many regions. There is a growing awareness that if the ecumenical movement is not rooted in the life of people and is not looked at from the perspective of people, its authenticity and credibility will be considerably undermined. In fact, ecumenism is not something to be imported from the outside or developed on an institution-centred basis; rather, it must emanate from the very life of people and be owned by the people. It must touch the life of people in all its layers and dimensions. As a consequence of people-centred ecumenism, a life-centred vision of ecumenism is emerging as a feasible paradigm. Such a vision, which has all the potential to take the ecumenical movement beyond its institutional expressions, is already in formation. The movement of "Churches Acting Together" is a concrete manifestation of it.

b) *An ecumenism that is responsive to changing realities*. The ecumenical movement, for some, is getting old; for others, it has already become obsolete. The current norms of ecumenical culture and forms of ecumenical structure are no longer adaptable to new environments. Furthermore, the ecumenical agenda is, to a large degree, outdated and incompatible with present needs and concerns. In addressing issues, the ecumenical movement has perceived its role mainly as one of discerning and articulating. It is expected that the ecumenical movement go beyond its traditional role by seeking solutions, providing guidance and, when necessary, taking a strong prophetic stand. I also see a serious problem in the ability of the ecumenical institutions to respond promptly and efficiently to the churches' expectations and global crisis. Institutional ecumenism has been preoccupied with its own problems and has, therefore, lost touch with the issues facing the churches. This growing gap between institutional ecumenism and the churches must be treated critically. Rather than the reactive ecumenism that we have been developing, we must build a responsive ecumenism that transforms and accompanies the churches in their efforts for the renewal of the church, an ecumenism that questions archaic perceptions and encourages creative reflection, and one that endeavours to replace traditional styles by innovative methodologies and conservative approaches by realistic attitudes.

c) *Ensuring the complementarity and wholeness of the ecumenical movement*. More and more churches are engaging in bilateral theological dialogue (a form of ecumenical relationship favoured

mainly by the Roman Catholic Church since the Vatican II Council) and in bilateral ecumenical collaboration. As a result, multilateral ecumenism is declining and conciliar ecumenism is stagnating. The ecumenical movement is developing in four directions: bilateral theological dialogue, bilateral ecumenical partnerships, institutional ecumenism and people's ecumenism. The ecumenical institutions and the churches thus far have not been able to ensure the complementarity of these directions. In fact, we are now witnessing the emerging signs of polarization, identifiable in many areas and on different levels of ecumenical life, and a steady disintegration in many ecumenical institutions. It is vitally important to establish coherence between ecumenical structures, initiatives or actions on global, regional and national levels. It is even more important to ensure the oneness, wholeness and integrity of the ecumenical movement. As the ecumenical statement on "Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches" (CUV) has stated, the WCC, as the most organised and institutional manifestation of the ecumenical movement, is obliged to engage in this major task.² During the last decade, the Council has made considerable efforts to strengthen the inclusiveness of the ecumenical movement; yet, in my judgment, we have not been so successful in manifesting concretely, even with the Roman Catholic Church, the oneness and the wholeness of the ecumenical movement. It seems to me that if the churches, the main owners and actors of the ecumenical movement, do not assume this critical task, the ecumenical organisations will be dominated by ecumenical partners and the churches' ecumenical work will be confined to bilateral theological dialogues.

d) *Unitive or divisive ecumenism?* When the ecumenical movement came into existence, its stated aim was to destroy the "walls of separation" (Eph. 2:14) and lead the churches to visible unity. However, due to intra and inter-church developments and changing circumstances in the world, the ecumenical movement has become a space for new tensions and alienations. Controversies and divisions pertaining to ethical, political and social issues are often echoed in the ecumenical movement. Many churches misinterpret ecumenism; they equate it with the forces of liberalism and secularism. They fear that it threatens the church's moral teachings and will lead to proseletysm and syncretism. The WCC and many regional and national councils, and even world communions, have suffered from this misperception. This situation calls for deep reflection, a comprehensive approach and careful treatment. The only way to cope with this complex situation is for churches and ecumenical institutions to listen to and trust each other, understand each other's sensitivities and respect each other's concerns. The ecumenical movement must continue to provide space for the churches to engage in honest dialogue and creative interaction in order to see their contradictions clearly. It must also assist them to strive for greater coherence and consensus, while remaining faithful to their diversities.

² *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches: A Policy Statement*. Geneva, 1997, pp.18-20.

e) *Emergence of new models of ecumenism.* For a long time the ecumenical stakeholders and actors were limited to churches and their hierarchs; they now include donor agencies and specialized ministries. New ways of “being” ecumenical and “doing” ecumenism are unfolding: networking is replacing institutions, advocacy is substituting the programme; membership-based ecumenism is losing its importance and an ecumenism of partnership and alliance is gaining ground. More and more churches and ecumenical circles consider the ecumenical movement as a ‘forum’ or a ‘space’ for encounter and collaboration. These new models of ecumenism are not only strengthening the non-committal ecumenism, but also sidelining the goal of visible unity. I believe that we should not waste any more time and energy on the perpetuation of vestiges of ageing ecumenism. The ecumenical movement must serve its sacred cause and not remain paralyzed within ossified structures. I also believe that any form of ecumenism that does not create restlessness and does not generate commitment is not ecumenism. “Easy-going” and “free-lance” ecumenism impedes our ecumenical journey. We need ecumenical models that constantly challenge the churches not simply to co-habitate, but to grow together, to move from self-sufficient existence to interdependent existence, from unilateral witness to multilateral witness. This is the true ecumenical way.

f) *Are the institutions or the vision in crisis?* The ecumenical movement has always faced crises. Many believe that crisis is inherent in the institution. I agree. In my view, the ecumenical vision is also facing crisis. Some maintain that the problem is not so much with the vision, but with the way its imperatives and challenges are perceived and translated into reality. Others, however, are convinced that we are already beyond CUV, and, therefore, must seek a new vision for the 21st century. The real problem, in my judgement, is twofold: the ecumenical institutions have started to lose contact with the vision; and the vision appears to be vague and ambiguous. We must not become captives of our ecumenical institutions; neither must we be trapped in our ecumenical vision. The ecumenical movement cannot be equated to the programmatic activity; it cannot be reduced to mere advocacy and networking. The institution cannot replace the spirituality, and action cannot replace the vision. As the gift of the Holy Spirit and as a future-oriented movement, the ecumenical movement transcends its institutional limitations and geographical expressions. What the ecumenical movement needs is a fresh articulation of its spirituality and vision. The horizontal dimension of the ecumenical movement must be under-girded by a vertical dimension, namely by a spirituality that will make the ecumenical movement a source of renewal and transformation. Furthermore, the ecumenical vision must be constantly re-assessed and redefined, both in faithfulness to the Gospel message and in response to changing conditions.

21. These developments will continue to have an impact on the WCC and we must have the courage to accept not only the Council’s strengths, but also its vulnerability and fragility;

along with its achievements, we must also have the humility to recognize its deficiencies and failures. A triumphant spirit will only deepen the stagnation, and a protective spirit will further isolate the Council from the ecumenical movement. The WCC is not an organization to be evaluated only on “checks and balances”. It is a fellowship of prayer and hope. The Council is called to become the sign, agent and instrument of a credible, reliable and responsive ecumenism. To achieve such a goal, the Council must undergo a profound change and renewal in its way of thinking and acting, and of organizing and communicating its work.

Beyond the assembly: looking forward

22. An assembly is also a unique opportunity to look forward, to attempt to identify those emerging priority areas and major concerns that will determine the future agenda and course of the Council. The post-Assembly period should be marked by intensive strategic planning, the aim of which should be to reshape the programmatic framework of the Council. In this process, which must start in this Assembly, I strongly believe that the following issues need to be given serious consideration:

Fellowship-building: an ecumenical priority

23. In spite of continuous efforts to fulfil itself as a fellowship of churches, the WCC has remained an organization located in Geneva. More than ever, the fellowship character of the Council faces tremendous challenges: first, with the widening gap between the member churches and the Council; second, with the increasing participation of the ecumenical partners in the life and witness of the Council; third, with the growing shift of emphasis from fellowship-building to an advocacy-oriented role of the Council.

a) For many, unity is no longer an ecumenical priority, but, rather, an academic topic or at best an eschatological goal. In fact, as a new ecumenical methodology and strategy, the Council has linked unity to ethical, social and missiological issues. As a result, unity has lost much of its centrality and urgency. The Council must re-emphasize the vital importance of visible unity by re-embarking on convergence and reception processes, particularly through the following studies: “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”,³ “Confessing the One Faith”,⁴ and “The Nature and Mission of the Church”.⁵ Yet, on the other hand, the Council must also deepen the theological conviction that the quest for unity and engagement in common witness and service to the world are not mutually exclusive, but are, rather, mutually enriching.

³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111, Geneva, 1982.

⁴ *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith*, Faith and Order Paper no. 153, Geneva, 1991.

⁵ *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper no. 198, Geneva, 2005.

b) What kind of Council are we: an organization that plans activities, sets programmes and initiates advocacies, or, a fellowship that strives for the visible unity of the church? I would say both. I do not see any dilemma or ambiguity; these two aspects of the Council's work condition and strengthen each other. Because we are an organisation, it is imperative that we work with a broader constituency, including ecumenical partners. It is also crucial for the future of the ecumenical movement that we develop a sense of mutuality and complementarity with ecumenical partners. The Council needs their expertise and financial resources. We must bear in mind, however, that the creation of new alliances and advocacies and the growing partnership with ecumenical partners may, sooner or later, reduce the fellowship character of the Council. The WCC cannot be transformed into a global ecumenical organization that simply facilitates, networks, and organizes activities. This would deny the very nature and vocation of the Council. The Council must remain accountable to the churches as a church-based fellowship; yet it needs more space for creative reflection and action. As the CUV has indicated, "deepening" and "widening" of the Council's fellowship are inseparable.⁶ Therefore, the specificity of the Council as a fellowship of churches and its unique role as an organization within the world-wide ecumenical movement need to be balanced, re-affirmed and reshaped.

c) Some churches believe that there are other ways of articulating ecumenical engagement. Hence, they are committed to working together rather than growing together and dialoguing within the membership of the Council. How can we initiate a process of deeper ownership of the Council by the member churches? The Council is the member churches in their common commitment to the Gospel and to one another. The Council must listen more carefully to the churches; its primary focus must be to deepen fellowship. And the churches must take their membership in the Council more seriously, and must recognise that being part of WCC fellowship has spiritual, ecumenical and financial implications. Once, when I asked a church leader what his church does for the WCC, he said: "we raise money". I said: "you must also raise awareness". Indeed, building fellowship entails deepening awareness, strengthening confidence and making sacrifices. At the Harare Assembly, the churches said: "We now commit ourselves to being together in a continuing growth towards visible unity".⁷ We are called to give a new quality to our fellowship: by sharpening the Council's accountability to the churches and by enhancing the churches ownership of the Council; by seeking new ways of reflecting, working and acting together; by initiating new ways of "being church" together. If a minimum ecclesiological basis is not ensured for the Council, our fel-

⁶ *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches: A Policy Statement*. Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1997. p. 14-15.

⁷ Diane Kessler, ed., *Together on the Way – Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, 1999, p. 3.

lowship will always remain shaky and ambiguous. Is it not the time to revisit the Toronto statement?⁸

From change of rules to change of ethos

24. Since the end of the cold war, the WCC and the Orthodox churches have basically followed separate directions, with different concerns and priorities. The WCC has neither fully nor correctly understood the Orthodox expectations in their attempt to recover and rediscover their identity and place in the post-communist society; at the same time, the Orthodox churches' criticism of the Council has been exaggerated to the extent of ignoring fundamental ecumenical achievements, in which it had played a significant role. Some of the WCC-Orthodox tensions and estrangement were caused by the intra-Orthodox situation, the changing realities in new societies with a predominantly Orthodox population and the internal structure and agenda of the Council. After seven years of intensive work, the Special Commission, which was created by the Harare Assembly, has identified a number of specific areas that require serious review. The Commission's recommendations have been adopted by the Central Committee. Matters pertaining to the constitution and bylaws are on the agenda of the Assembly.

a) The consensus model in voting procedures is the most important achievement of the Commission. Through it the Council will experience a fundamental change by moving from a parliamentary voting system to consensus building. The consensus model is not only intended to change voting procedures; it is expected that it will promote participation, ownership and fellowship. Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity; rather, it means preserving diversity and respecting differences, and, at the same time, overcoming contradictions and alienation. Therefore, it is not merely a procedural matter; it is intended to challenge us to share our theological insights and spiritual experiences, as well as display our perspectives and concerns more effectively, empowering each other and seeking together the mind of the church. Initially, consensus was a move to strengthen the participation of the Orthodox churches. It must go beyond the Orthodox churches, and remind all member churches that they, together, constitute a fellowship and, therefore, are called to address issues in a non-confrontational way and in a spirit of mutual openness and trust.

⁸ In 1950, the WCC Central Committee, meeting in Toronto, formulated a text on "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches" (see *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1965*, ed. Lukas Vischer, St. Louis, MO, Bethany press, 1963, pp. 167-176). This text, which is referred to in ecumenical literature as "Toronto Statement", remains fundamental for any common understanding of the WCC. It is in two parts; the first part makes five declarations about what the WCC is not; the second part offers eight positive assumptions which underlie life in the Council.

b) Would the consensus model and other recommendations of the Special Commission change the ethos of the Council? In fact, the “Orthodox consultations” that we have organised, “Orthodox statements” that we have made, “Orthodox contributions” that we have offered to the Council since its creation in 1948 have, undoubtedly, had some impact; but they did not bring about any real change in the Western Protestant-dominated style, structure and methodology of the Council. This failure was mainly due to the lack of consistent and persistent engagement and follow-up on the part of the Orthodox churches, as well as to the reluctance and indifference of the Protestant churches regarding the Orthodox concerns and contribution. Here is the real problem; here is also the real challenge. The Special Commission has proposed new ways of working together in respect to controversial matters and divisive issues. It is expected that the Orthodox churches will be better heeded and understood. I hope that the Orthodox churches will, in their turn, seize this opportunity to bring more organised and efficient participation in all areas and at all levels of the Council’s life and work. The Council’s ethos cannot be immediately changed by the findings of the Special Commission. We must be realistic and patient. The critical question remains: how can the Council move from a change of rules to a change of ethos? All the member churches have a pivotal role to play in this long and difficult process.

c) Do the findings of the Special Commission meet the “Orthodox concerns”? Some Orthodox churches are not fully satisfied with the work of the Commission. Some Protestant members of the Council also have reservations about certain aspects of the Commission’s work. Besides common approaches, divergences and ambiguities will continue to exist. What the Special Commission has thus far achieved is not the end; it is only the beginning of a process. Further work needs to be done, particularly in respect to membership, common prayer, ecclesiology, social, and ethical issues. The times of Orthodox “contributions” have gone; and the time of Orthodox integration into WCC has come. This process must be primarily initiated in the Orthodox churches at the grassroots level by building awareness of the importance of ecumenism for the life of the church. It must find its concrete expression through the active involvement of the Orthodox representatives in programme-related committees that constitute, in a sense, the heart of the Council’s work. Consensus and the recommendations of the Special Commission facilitate this process. I hope that the WCC-Orthodox crisis will shake and challenge all member churches in their ecumenical commitment.

Reconfiguration: a process of renewal

25. The ecumenical institutions have been shaped in response to the old world order. They are incompatible with the new world context. The present ecumenical landscape, with its new developments and realities, may soon create confusion and disorientation if it is not crit-

ically assessed and reordered. In the last decade, the WCC has sought to address, through the CUV and Special Commission, urgent and pertinent questions facing the ecumenical movement in general and the Council in particular. The “reconfiguration” process that the Council recently embarked on must occupy an important place on the ecumenical agenda. The following questions and factors, in my view, need to be given due attention:

a) The concept of reconfiguration has different connotations in different regions, and the churches and ecumenical partners look at it with different perceptions and expectations. The common concern is that the ecumenical movement, in all its aspects and manifestations, needs a comprehensive and realistic re-evaluation, and a reshaping and refocusing. Therefore, reconfiguration must not be considered as a Council-related project with limited scope and implications. It must be perceived and organized as a global and common venture, involving all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, ecumenical institutions, partners and different ecumenical actors.

b) Reconfiguration must not be confined to merely mapping and reordering of the oikoumene. It must basically aim to renew the ecumenical life and witness by: adapting its culture to new conditions, restructuring the ecumenical institutions, reviewing the programmes and relationships, deepening the quality of growing together, establishing coherence and networking among different forms and expressions of ecumenism, and broadening the scope of ecumenical partnership. The Council has not been able to incorporate CUV fully into its programmatic work. Although CUV, as a vision statement, still retains its relevance for the whole ecumenical movement, it needs reinterpretation. The CUV and the work of the Special Commission must be given proper attention in this process.

c) The ecumenical movement should develop an integrated approach to its institutions, agenda, and goals, as well as to its way of reflecting and acting. It must also develop an integrated perspective to respond to the critical issues and major challenges of the world. The integrated approach, which opposes the unilateral and isolated initiatives by promoting an interactive and co-ordinated perspective, is not merely a question of methodology or strategy; it is an ontological reality pertaining to the *esse* of Christian faith. Such an approach may also ensure the effectiveness of ecumenical witness.

d) The ecumenical movement is currently in a dilemma, wavering between integration and disintegration, partnership and fragmentation, advocacy and fellowship, and bilateralism and multi-lateralism. By its very nature, being a growing fellowship of churches, the WCC also has a facilitating, networking and co-ordinating role in the world-wide ecumenical movement. This specific and privileged vocation of the Council must acquire more visibility and efficiency at this critical juncture of ecumenical history.

e) The ecumenical movement is facing a crisis of credibility and relevance. We must not respond only by reconfiguring institutions. At the dawn of the 21st century, what the ecu-

menical movement urgently needs in order to respond responsibly and effectively to the problems of new times and the expectations of the churches, is fundamentally “*aggiornamento*”, i.e. renewal and transformation.

f) The Roman Catholic Church has been calling for “clarity” concerning the theological foundation and vision of ecumenism. I share this concern. One of the most valuable contributions of the reconfiguration process could be the development of what I call a shared ecumenical vision. By shared vision I mean a comprehensive review and articulation of ecumenical goals, with which all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, and ecumenical partners can associate themselves. This shared vision must sustain our ecumenical action irrespective of its institutional or ecclesial framework. Such a step would significantly enhance the ecumenical goals. Otherwise, the growing activism may weaken the spiritual and theological basis of the ecumenical movement. Reconfiguration must also take into consideration this important matter.

Violence: a major ecumenical concern

26. In response to a growing culture of death, the Harare Assembly launched a *Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2000-2010) (DOV)*. In embarking on this landmark process, the Council said: “We will strive together to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence”, and our prophetic vocation calls us to be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice”.⁹ Regional launches, annual focus campaigns (Latin America is the focus for 2006), peace to the city projects and resource materials, significantly helped raise awareness and promote values of life, tolerance, and compassion. Responding to and overcoming violence must remain a major ecumenical priority. By assessing the insights and experiences gained during the first half of the Decade, the Assembly will certainly give its direction for the period ahead of us. In this context, I want to share with you a few perspectives:

a) We have repeatedly stated that DOV, being a Council-wide focus, is basically an ecumenical process. It is, therefore, vitally important that the ecumenical movement, with all its institutional expressions, consider “overcoming violence” as an urgent priority. The Christian contribution to this global campaign against violence must be reorganised in light of new developments, and its specificity be more sharply spelled out.

b) Violence is a complex phenomenon with different faces. The DOV must address not just the symptoms or blatant eruptions of violence, but also its root causes and its surrounding ideology.

⁹ *World Council of Churches, Central Committee, Minutes of the Fifty-First Meeting, Potsdam, Germany, 28 January – 16 February 2001, Geneva, 2001, p. 177.*

c) Overcoming violence implies understanding the “other”, and promoting compassion, tolerance, and the values of co-existence. Religions can play a pivotal role in this context. Inter-religious dialogue and collaboration can serve as a proper framework to enhance community building.

d) Overcoming violence means healing memories by accepting the truth and thus moving towards forgiveness and reconciliation. DOV calls the churches to work for reconciliation. As an efficient way of conflict resolution, which is a vital dimension of Christian faith, the Council must take this particular area most seriously.

e) Often the root cause of violence is the denial of justice. Working for justice is an important way to overcome violence. On the other hand, sometimes violence is used to achieve justice. The inter-relatedness of justice and violence is a critical matter that requires a more comprehensive and deeper analysis. In this context, the study document prepared by CCIA on the protection of endangered population in situations of armed violence,¹⁰ which was sent to the churches for reflection and reaction, must be revisited.

f) The church’s approach to violence must be proactive and not reactive. Non-violence must be considered as a powerful strategy and an active approach to overcoming violence. The church must preach tolerance, mutual openness and acceptance. Our Christian vocation is to become agents of God’s reconciliation, healing and transformation. Others’ strategy is “war on terror”; ours is “overcoming violence”; others’ objective is “security”, even by military intervention; ours is peace with justice and the promotion of mutual understanding and trust.

Youth: the generator of a new course in ecumenism

27. “*God, in your grace, let the youth transform the world*”. This is what the youth said with a profound sense of humility, responsibility and courage at the last meeting of the Central Committee. They called for a more open church, more relevant theology, more credible ecumenism, more participatory society. I fully associate myself with the youths’ firm commitment and clear vision. As head of a church and as moderator, I have always enjoyed and been enriched listening to the youth in my church and in ecumenical circles. Listening to the youth! What a challenge to each of us sitting on chairs of authority in our respective churches and in ecumenical institutions. Certainly, youth have an important role to play in our churches, the ecumenical movement and our societies. But, to simply state that idea is not enough. We must engage them fully in the total life of the churches and the ecumenical movement at large. In this respect I want to make a few observations:

¹⁰ “The Protection of Endangered Populations in Situations of Armed Violence: Toward an Ecumenical Ethical Approach”, in *Central Committee, Minutes, Fifty-First Meeting, Potsdam*, pp. 219-242.

a) Youth have a special role in “being church”. I consider the role of youth as being essentially an agent of transformation. We must help the youth to move from the fringes of our churches to the heart of the churches’ life and witness, including the decision-making processes. I cannot imagine a church without its youth. They ensure the church’s vitality and renewal. Youth should be actors, not merely listeners; they should be leaders, not merely followers.

b) Youth have a major role to play in “being ecumenical”. They are called to become actively involved in reshaping and transforming the ecumenical movement. When we organize meetings or appoint committees, we should not regard youth as merely an appendix or a separate category. The question of youth is neither about quotas nor about programmes directed specifically at youth. I want to see youth actively present in all categories, in all places, in all areas, and at all levels of the whole life and witness of the churches and the ecumenical movement.

c) The ecumenical formation of youth is of decisive importance for the future of the ecumenical movement. The quality and quantity of persons interested in ecumenical life, both in the WCC and elsewhere, is declining. The survival of the ecumenical movement is largely conditioned on the active and responsible involvement of youth. A vision requires visionaries to dream and struggle for its realization. The preparation of a new ecumenical generation is imperative. It must become a major focus for the ecumenical movement. The future belongs to those who have the vision and courage to shape it.

d) If we do not empower our youth, they will find other “spaces” outside the churches and the ecumenical movement to create their own networks and seek other ways of expressing their concerns, their dreams and visions. The 8th Assembly was a Jubilee Assembly. This Assembly must become a Youth Assembly, not only by a strong youth presence, but also by their impact-making participation and challenging perspectives. Youth should become the pioneers of a new ecumenical order, as well as the avant-garde of a new ecumenical future.

A journey of faith and hope

28. I started my ecumenical journey as a youth delegate with such feelings and commitment. I was so delighted when, a few years ago, a group of young people from different parts of the world, meeting in my own church in Antelias, Lebanon, stated that being ecumenical “belongs to the very essence of being church”.¹¹ This is what I myself learned out of my existential experience in the ecumenical movement.

¹¹ “Vision from Youth Consultation on Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement”, *Consultation on Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement. Convened by the World Council of Churches, 17-21 November 2005, Antelias, Lebanon.*

Being ecumenical means engaging in a common mission and diakonia, and struggling for the visible unity of the church.

Being ecumenical means praying together, working together, suffering together, sharing together, witnessing together.

Being ecumenical means perceiving our essential identity not in those matters that distinguish us from each other, but in our faithfulness to the Gospel imperatives.

Being ecumenical means affirming our diversities, and at the same time transcending them to discover our common identity and unity in Christ.

Being ecumenical means being a church that constantly fulfils itself as a missionary reality in response to God's call in a changing world.

Being ecumenical means being firmly committed to and responsibly engaged in a journey of faith and hope.

29. In Amsterdam, at the 1st Assembly of the WCC (1948), we said: "*we intend to stay together*". In Porto Alegre we must say: "*we shall stay together*" in this journey of faith and hope towards God's future.

30. When I assumed my task as moderator in 1991, I said: "The sea is stormy; we are called by God to sail, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the ecumenical boat in the stormy sea". The ecumenical movement is a boat moving forward. The profound symbolism of this image will always challenge us. While sailing through the stormy sea, the ecumenical boat has taken on plenty of water. Some would even say that the ecumenical boat is foundering. I deeply believe that our spiritual courage to seek new visions, our profound faith to hope for a new future, our firm commitment to the ecumenical cause will keep the ecumenical boat strong and straight in the terrible storms of the world.

31. The ecumenical journey is a pilgrimage of faith and hope. I have been on this pilgrimage since 1970 – what a short period of time for such a long journey! In this journey of faith and hope I have had dreams:

I dreamed that mutual recognition of baptism, the seal of our Christian identity and foundation of our Christian unity would soon be realized. I dreamed that all the churches of the world would celebrate the Resurrection of our common Lord together on the same day, as one of the visible expressions of Christian unity. I dreamed that an Ecumenical Assembly – if not an Ecumenical Council at this point in time – would be convened with the participation of all churches to celebrate their fellowship in Christ and address common challenges facing the church and humanity. Dreaming is an essential dimension of "being ecumenical". I am confident that new generations, sustained by renewed faith and hope, vision and commitment, will continue dreaming.

I am grateful to all those who, in this ecumenical journey, strengthened my faith, nurtured my reflection, supported my action and enriched my diakonia. I have had the privilege to work closely with three General Secretaries: Rev. Dr Emilio Castro, Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser and Rev. Dr Sam Kobia, and four Vice-Moderators, Bishop Dr Nelida Ritchie, Bishop Dr Soritua Nababan, Dr Marion Best and Judge Sofia Adinyira, as well as with so many sisters and brothers in Christ from different parts of the oikoumene. Let God judge what I gave to the WCC. What I took from the WCC transformed my life and my ministry. I give thanks to God for granting me this privilege of serving Him through the WCC.

Recently, an ecumenical friend asked me: "Will this assembly be the epilogue of your ecumenical journey?" I said: "On the contrary; it will become the prologue of my new ecumenical journey." Ecumenism has become integral to my very being. Enriched by many years of experience, I will become even more ecumenically engaged. With the help of God, I will continue this journey of hope and faith as one of the devoted ecumenical pilgrims praying with you and with so many people around the world:

God, in your grace, transform our churches.

God, in your grace, transform the ecumenical movement.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

Archbishop Rowan Williams is primate of all England and leader of the Anglican Communion.

If someone says to you 'Identify yourself!' you will probably answer first by giving your name – then perhaps describing the work you do, the place you come from, the relations in which you stand¹. In many cultures, you would give the name of your parents or your extended family. To speak about 'identity', then, is to speak about how we establish our place in the language and the world of those around us: names are there to be used, to be spoken to us, not just by us; work is how we join in the human process of transforming our environment; and who we are becomes clear to those around when we put ourselves in a map of relationships. Before we start thinking about what is essential to Christian identity in the abstract, it may help us just for a moment to stay with this element of simply putting ourselves on the map.

So in these terms how do we as Christians answer the challenge to identify ourselves? We carry the name of Christ. We are the people who are known for their loyalty to, their affiliation with, the historical person who was given the title of 'anointed monarch' by his followers – Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth. Every time we say 'Christian', we take for granted a story and a place in history, the story and place of those people with whom God made an alliance in the distant past, the people whom he called so that in their life together he might show his glory. We are already in the realm of work and relations. We are involved with that history of God's covenant. As those who are loyal to an 'anointed monarch' in the Jewish tradition, our lives are supposed to be living testimony to the faithfulness of God to his commitments. There is no way of spelling out our identity that does not get us involved in this story and this context. Explaining the very word 'Christ' means explaining what it is to be a people who exist because God has promised to be with them and whom God has commanded to show what he is like.

And to say that we are now under the authority of an anointed monarch whose life on earth was two millennia ago is also to say at once something about that 'monarch'. His life and

¹ This article is copyright Rowan Williams, used with permission.

presence are not just a matter of record, of narrative. There are groups that identify themselves by their founders – Lutherans, Marxists – but the name Christians use of themselves is not like that because of what the title ‘Christ’ means. We do not look back to a founder; we look now, around, within, for a presence that has authority over our lives and is active today. And so we already imply the ways in which we shall be thinking theologically, doctrinally, about the story of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

But as we go further, the identity we are sketching becomes fuller still. What does the anointed king tell us to do and how does he give us power to do it? We are to reveal, like the Jewish people, that the God whose authority the king holds is a God of justice, impartial, universal, and a God who is free to forgive offences. But we are also to show who God is by the words our king tells us to address to God. We are to call him ‘Father’, to speak in intimate and bold words. Our identity is not just about relations with other human beings and our labours to shape those relationships according to justice and mercy. It is about our relation to God, and the ‘work’ of expressing that relation in our words and acts. In Greek, the word *leitourgeia* first meant work for the sake of the public good, before it came to mean the public service of God. Christian identity is ‘liturgical’ in both senses, the work of a people, a community, showing God to each other and to the world around them, in daily action and in worship. Our ‘liturgy’ is both the adoration of God for God’s own sake and the service of a world distorted by pride and greed. It is expressed not only in passion for the human family, especially in the middle of poverty and violence, but in passion for the whole material world, which continues to suffer the violence involved in sustaining the comfort of a prosperous human minority at the cost of our common resources.

‘Identify yourself!’ says the world to the Christian; and the Christian says (as the martyrs of the first centuries said), ‘We are the servants of a monarch, the monarch of a nation set free by God’s special action to show his love and strength in their life together, a monarch whose authority belongs to the present and the future as much as the past. We are witnesses to the consistency of a God who cannot be turned aside from his purpose by any created power, or by any failure or betrayal on our part. We are more than servants or witnesses, because we are enabled to speak as if we were, like our king, free to be intimate with God; God has stepped across the distance between ourselves and heaven, and has brought us close to him. When we speak directly to God, we speak in a voice God himself has given us to use.’

So, as Christians spell out, bit by bit, what is the meaning of the name they use of themselves, they put themselves on the map of human history. Before they start analyzing the doctrines that are necessary for this identity to be talked about and communicated abstractly, they speak of themselves as belonging in this story and this set of possibilities. Creed and structure flow from this. And it can be put most forcefully, even shockingly, if we say that Christians identify themselves not only as servants of the anointed king but as Christ. Their

place in the world is his place. By allowing themselves to be caught up into his witness and doing what his authority makes possible for them, in work and worship, they stand where he stands. The Christian Scriptures say that believers bear the name of Christ, that this name is written on their foreheads, that their life together is a material 'body' for the anointed king on earth.

Christian identity is to belong in a place that Jesus defines for us. By living in that place, we come in some degree to share his identity, to bear his name and to be in the same relationships he has with God and with the world. Forget 'Christianity' for a moment – Christianity as a system of ideas competing with others in the market: concentrate on the place in the world that is the place of Jesus the anointed, and what it is that becomes possible in that place.

There is a difference between seeing the world as basically a territory where systems compete, where groups with different allegiances live at each other's expense, where rivalry is inescapable, and seeing the world as a territory where being in a particular place makes it possible for you to see, to say and to do certain things that aren't possible elsewhere. The claim of Christian belief is not first and foremost that it offers the only accurate system of thought, as against all other competitors; it is that, by standing in the place of Christ, it is possible to live in such intimacy with God that no fear or failure can ever break God's commitment to us, and to live in such a degree of mutual gift and understanding that no human conflict or division need bring us to uncontrollable violence and mutual damage. From here, you can see what you need to see to be at peace with God and with God's creation; and also what you need to be at peace with yourself, acknowledging your need of mercy and re-creation.

This perspective assumes from the beginning that we live in a world of plural perspectives, and that there is no 'view from nowhere', as philosophers sometimes express the claim to absolute knowledge. To be a Christian is not to lay claim to absolute knowledge, but to lay claim to the perspective that will transform our most deeply rooted hurts and fears and so change the world at the most important level. It is a perspective that depends on being where Jesus is, under his authority, sharing the 'breath' of his life, seeing what he sees – God as Abba, Father, a God completely committed to the people in whose life he seeks to reproduce his own life.

In what sense is this an exclusive claim? In one way, it can be nothing except exclusive. There is no Christian identity that does not begin from this place. Try to reconstruct the 'identity' from principles, ideals or whatever, and you end up with something that is very different from the scriptural account of being 'in Christ'. And because being in Christ is bound up with one and only one particular history – that of Jewish faith and of the man from Nazareth – it is simply not clear what it would mean to say that this perspective could in principle be gained by any person anywhere with any sort of commitments. Yet in another

sense exclusivism is impossible here, certainly the exclusivism of a system of ideas and conclusions that someone claims to be final and absolute. The place of Jesus is open to all who want to see what Christians see and to become what Christians are becoming. And no Christian believer has in his or her possession some kind of map of where exactly the boundaries of that place are to be fixed, or a key to lock others out or in.

In the nature of the case, the Christian does not see what can be seen from other perspectives. He or she would be foolish to say that nothing can be seen or that every other perspective distorts everything so badly that there can be no real truth told. If I say that only in this place are hurts fully healed, sins forgiven, adoption into God's intimate presence promised, that assumes that adoption and forgiveness are to be desired above all other things. Not every perspective has that at the centre. What I want to say about those other views is not that they are in error but that they leave out what matters most in human struggle; yet I know that this will never be obvious to those others, and we can only come together, we can only introduce others into our perspective, in the light of the kind of shared labour and shared hope that brings into central focus what I believe to be most significant for humanity. And meanwhile that sharing will also tell me that there may be things – perhaps of less ultimate importance, yet enormously significant – that my perspective has not taught me to see or to value.

What does this mean for the actual, on-the-ground experience of living alongside the plurality of religious communities – and non-religious ones too – that we cannot escape or ignore in our world? I believe that our emphasis should not be on possessing a system in which all questions are answered, but precisely on witness to the place and the identity that we have been invited to live in. We are to show what we see, to reproduce the life of God as it has been delivered to us by the anointed. And it seems from what we have already been saying that at the heart of this witness must be faithful commitment. Christian identity is a faithful identity, an identity marked by consistently being with both God and God's world. We must be faithful to God, in prayer and liturgy, we must simply stand again and again where Jesus is, saying, 'Abba'. When Christians pray the eucharistic prayer, they take the place of Jesus, both as he prays to the Father and as he offers welcome to the world at his table. The eucharist is the celebration of the God who keeps promises and whose hospitality is always to be trusted. But this already tells us that we have to be committed to those around us, whatever their perspective. Their need, their hope, their search for healing at the depth of their humanity is something with which we must, as we say in English, 'keep faith'. That is to say, we must be there to accompany this searching, asking critical questions with those of other faiths, sometimes asking critical questions of them also. As we seek transformation together, it may be by God's gift that others may find their way to see what we see and to know what is possible for us.

But what of their own beliefs, their own 'places'? Sometimes when we look at our neighbours of other traditions, it can be as if we see in their eyes a reflection of what we see; they do not have the words we have, but something is deeply recognisable. The language of 'anonymous Christianity' is now not much in fashion – and it had all kinds of problems about it. Yet who that has been involved in dialogue with other faiths has not had the sense of an echo, a reflection, of the kind of life Christians seek to live? St Paul says that God did not leave himself without witnesses in the ages before the Messiah; in those places where that name is not named, God may yet give himself to be seen. Because we do not live there, we cannot easily analyse let alone control how this may be. And to acknowledge this is not at all to say that what happens in the history of Israel and Jesus is relative, one way among others. This, we say, is the path to forgiveness and adoption. But when others appear to have arrived at a place where forgiveness and adoption are sensed and valued, even when these things are not directly spoken of in the language of another faith's mainstream reflection, are we to say that God has not found a path for himself?

And when we face radically different notions, strange and complex accounts of a perspective not our own, our questions must be not 'How do we convict them of error? How do we win the competition of ideas?' but, 'What do they actually see? and can what they see be a part of the world that I see?' These are questions that can be answered only by faithfulness – that is, by staying with the other. Our calling to faithfulness, remember, is an aspect of our own identity and integrity. To work patiently alongside people of other faiths is not an option invented by modern liberals who seek to relativise the radical singleness of Jesus Christ and what was made possible through him. It is a necessary part of being where he is; it is a dimension of 'liturgy', staying before the presence of God and the presence of God's creation (human and non-human) in prayer and love. If we are truly learning how to be in that relation with God and the world in which Jesus of Nazareth stood, we shall not turn away from those who see from another place. And any claim or belief that we see more or more deeply is always rightly going to be tested in those encounters where we find ourselves working for a vision of human flourishing and justice in the company of those who do not start where we have started.

But the call to faithfulness has some more precise implications as well. In a situation where Christians are historically a majority, faithfulness to the other means solidarity with them, the imperative of defending them and standing with them in times of harassment or violence. In a majority Christian culture, the Christian may find himself or herself assisting the non-Christian community or communities to find a public voice. In the UK, this has been a matter largely of developing interfaith forums, working with other communities over issues around migration and asylum and common concerns about international justice, about poverty or environmental degradation, arguing that other faiths should have a share in the

partnership between the state and the Church in education, and, not least, continuing to build alliances against anti-semitism. The pattern is not dissimilar elsewhere in Europe. There is a proper element of Christian self-examination involved here as Christians recognize the extent to which their societies have not been hospitable or just to the other.

However, the question also arises of what faithfulness means in a majority non-Christian culture; and this is less straightforward. For a variety of reasons, some based on fact and some on fantasy, many non-Christian majorities regard Christian presence as a threat, or at least as the sign of a particular geopolitical agenda (linked with the USA or the West in general) – despite the long history of Christian minorities in so many such contexts. One of the most problematic effects of recent international developments has been precisely to associate Christians in the Middle East or Pakistan, for example, with an alien and aggressive policy in the eyes of an easily manipulated majority. The suffering of Christian minorities as a result of this is something which all our churches and the whole of this Assembly need constantly to keep in focus.

Yet what is remarkable is the courage with which Christians continue – in Egypt, in Pakistan, in the Balkans, even in Iraq – to seek ways of continuing to work alongside non-Christian neighbours. This is not the climate of ‘dialogue’ as it happens in the West or in the comfortable setting of international conferences; it is the painful making and remaking of trust in a deeply unsafe and complex environment. Only relatively rarely in such settings have Christians responded with counter-aggression or by absolute withdrawal. They continue to ask how they and those of other commitments can be citizens together. It is in this sort of context, I would say, that we most clearly see what it means to carry the cost of faithfulness, to occupy the place of Jesus and so to bear the stresses and sometimes the horrors of rejection and still to speak of sharing and hospitality. Here we see what it is to model a new humanity; and there is enough to suggest that such modelling can be contagious, can open up new possibilities for a whole culture. And this is not simply a question of patience in suffering. It also lays on Christians the task of speaking to those aspects of a non-Christian culture which are deeply problematic – where the environment is one in which human dignity, the status of women, the rule of law and similar priorities are not honoured as they should be. To witness in these things may lay Christians open to further attack or marginalisation, yet it remains part of that identity which we all seek to hold with integrity. Once again, where this happens, all of us need to find ways of making our solidarity real with believers in minority situations.

The question of Christian identity in a world of plural perspectives and convictions cannot be answered in clichés about the tolerant co-existence of different opinions. It is rather that the nature of our conviction as Christians puts us irrevocably in a certain place, which is both promising and deeply risky, the place where we are called to show utter commitment

to the God who is revealed in Jesus and to all those to whom his invitation is addressed. Our very identity obliges us to active faithfulness of this double kind. We are not called to win competitions or arguments in favour of our 'product' in some religious marketplace. If we are, in the words of Olivier Clément, to take our dialogue beyond the encounter of ideologies, we have to be ready to witness, in life and word, to what is made possible by being in the place of Jesus the anointed – 'our reasons for living, for loving less badly and dying less badly' (Clément, *Anachroniques*, p.307). 'Identify yourself!' And we do so by giving prayerful thanks for our place and by living faithfully where God in Jesus has brought us to be, so that the world may see what is the depth and cost of God's own fidelity to the world he has made.

LIVING A CULTURE OF PEACE

A Letter from the US Conference to the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches

This letter was read by the Very Rev Leonid Kisbkovsky of the Orthodox Church of America at the plenary which focussed on the decade to overcome violence.

Grace to you and peace from God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As leaders from the World Council of Churches member communions in the United States we greet the delegates to the 9th Assembly with joy and gratitude for your partnership in the Gospel in the years since we were last in Harare. During those years you have been constant in your love for us. We remember in particular the ways you embraced us with compassion in the days following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina just months ago. Your pastoral words, your gifts, and your prayers sustained us, reminding us that we were not alone but were joined in the Body of Christ to a community of deep encouragement and consolation. Even now you have welcomed us at this Assembly with rich hospitality. Know that we are profoundly grateful.

Yet we acknowledge as well that we are citizens of a nation that has done much in these years to endanger the human family and to abuse the creation. Following the terrorist attacks you sent “living letters” inviting us into a deeper solidarity with those who suffer daily from violence around the world. But our country responded by seeking to reclaim a privileged and secure place in the world, raining down terror on the truly vulnerable among our global neighbours. Our leaders turned a deaf ear to the voices of church leaders throughout our nation and the world, entering into imperial projects that seek to dominate and control for the sake of our own national interests. Nations have been demonised and God has been enlisted in national agendas that are nothing short of idolatrous. We lament with special anguish the war in Iraq, launched in deception and violating global norms of justice and human rights. We mourn all who have died or been injured in this war; we acknowledge with shame abuses carried out in our name; we confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to deter our leaders from this path of preemptive war. Lord, have mercy.

The rivers, oceans, lakes, rainforests, and wetlands that sustain us, even the air we breathe continue to be violated, and global warming goes unchecked while we allow God’s creation to veer toward destruction. Yet our own country refuses to acknowledge its complicity and rejects multilateral agreements aimed at reversing disastrous trends. We consume without

replenishing; we grasp finite resources as if they are private possessions; our uncontrolled appetites devour more and more of the earth's gifts. We confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to call our nation to global responsibility for the creation, that we ourselves are complicit in a culture of consumption that diminishes the earth. Christ, have mercy.

The vast majority of the peoples of the earth live in crushing poverty. The starvation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the treatable diseases that go untreated indict us, revealing the grim features of global economic injustice we have too often failed to acknowledge or confront. Our nation enjoys enormous wealth, yet we cling to our possessions rather than share. We have failed to embody the covenant of life to which our God calls us; hurricane Katrina revealed to the world those left behind in our own nation by the rupture of our social contract. As a nation we have refused to confront the racism that exists in our own communities and the racism that infects our policies around the world. We confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to call our nation to seek just economic structures so that sharing by all will mean scarcity for none. In the face of the earth's poverty, our wealth condemns us. Lord, have mercy.

Sisters and brothers in the ecumenical community, we come to you in this Assembly grateful for hospitality we don't deserve, for companionship we haven't earned, for an embrace we don't merit. In the hope that is promised in Christ and thankful for people of faith in our own country who have sustained our yearning for peace, we come to you seeking to be partners in the search for unity and justice. From a place seduced by the lure of empire we come to you in penitence, eager for grace, grace sufficient to transform spirits grown weary from the violence, degradation, and poverty our nation has sown, grace sufficient to transform spirits grown heavy with guilt, grace sufficient to transform the world. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.

LETTER FROM THE WCC GENERAL SECRETARY

A response to the letter from the US churches read
at the WCC Assembly

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

(1 John 1:8-9 NRSV)

Grace and peace to the members of the US Conference for the WCC, and to the people of the United States of America.

The 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting at Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006, asked me to respond to your statement to the assembly, offered as a prayer of lamentation and confession. In responding, we too must join sincerely in your expression of grief at ill-conceived actions and tragic events of recent years, and in your confession “that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough” to bring about positive transformation, and that “we ourselves are complicit in a culture ... that diminishes the earth.” We join you in these prayers to the Lord for mercy, and for peace.

Addressing terrorism in its many forms, the 9th Assembly affirmed that the World Council of Churches must continue to “accompany and support the churches as they respond prophetically and creatively in a pastoral and prophetic mission to assist those that are caught up in fear.” This we are eager to do, and we are grateful for the US churches’ statement as evidence of your continuing commitment to fellowship in faith, witness and action.

The form, content and tone of your statement to the 9th Assembly are reminiscent of documents foundational to the World Council of Churches. It is written in the spirit of love for the whole fellowship of churches, as invoked by the encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate addressed “unto the churches of Christ everywhere” in January 1920, and appeals for that mutual understanding which will prevent the “increasing and widening of existing dissensions”.¹ And, like the Stuttgart declaration by German Protestants following the second world war, your statement “applies the formula of the confession of guilt used in public worship to a politically disastrous situation”² and asks forgiveness from God, who

¹ “Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere”, in Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement; An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), page 12.

² Gerhard Sauter, “Stuttgart Declaration”, in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), page 1080.

alone redeems our lives and assures our future. It was in this context, in the aftermath of war, that the 1st Assembly of the WCC adopted these lines from its Assembly Message to the churches and the world:³

...There are millions who are hungry, millions who have no home, no country and no hope. Over all mankind hangs the peril of total war. We have to accept God's judgement upon us for our share in the world's guilt. Often we have tried to serve God and mammon, put other loyalties before loyalty to Christ, confused the Gospel with our own economic or national or racial interests, and feared war more than we have hated it. As we have talked to one another here, we have begun to understand how our separation has prevented us from receiving correction from one another in Christ. And because we lacked this correction, the world has often heard from us not the Word of God but the words of men.

But there is a word of God for our world. It is that the world is in the hands of the living God, Whose will for it is wholly good; that in Jesus Christ, His incarnate Word, Who lived and died and rose from the dead, God has broken the power of evil once for all, and opened for everyone the gate into freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit; that the final judgement on all human history and on every human deed is the judgement of the merciful Christ; and that the end of history will be the triumph of His Kingdom, where alone we shall understand how much God has loved the World. This is God's unchanging word to the world.

Confession is essential to the life of humanity, and to our fellowship in the ecumenical movement: this consists of confession of our sinfulness and many failures, yet also confession of faith in the power of God to overcome our sin and to transform us and the world around us. The apostle Paul recognized that "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10), for the admission of our impotence and lack of vision forces us to rely on the power of God and the wisdom of God.

When we admit our need for help, we realize our need both for the blessings of providence and for one another. This is the power of the ecumenical movement – to be open to one another, and learn from one another.

Inspired in no small part by the statement of the US Conference, the 9th Assembly adopted a Message that included a frank admission of our common sin:

We confess before you and all people:
 We have been unworthy servants.
 We have misused and abused the creation.

³ Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Readings in Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pages 368f.

We have wounded one another by divisions everywhere.
 We have often failed to take decisive action against environmental destruction,
 poverty, racism, caste-ism, war and genocide.
 We are not only victims but also perpetrators of violence.
 In all this, we have fallen short as disciples of Jesus Christ
 who in his incarnation came to save us and teach us how to love.
 Forgive us, God, and teach us to forgive one another.
 God, in your grace, transform the world.

Responding to concerns voiced by the US churches and others regarding violence and impunity, poverty and globalization, threats to the ecological systems of creation, the Message of the 9th Assembly continues:

God, hear the cries of all creation,
 the cries of the waters, the air, the land and all living things;
 the cries of all who are exploited, marginalized, abused and victimised,
 all who are dispossessed and silenced, their humanity ignored,
 all who suffer from any form of disease, from war
 and from the crimes of the arrogant who hide from the truth,
 distort memory and deny the possibility of reconciliation.

“God, guide all in seats of authority towards decisions of moral integrity.
 “God, in your grace, transform the world.

All this is set within the context of a confession of faith in the Triune God, who both forgives our trespasses and empowers us for good. And so our prayer leads us to new acts of dedication, new attempts to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to be noticed in this world:

By the power and guidance of your Holy Spirit, O God,
 may our prayers never be empty words
 but an urgent response to your living Word -
 in nonviolent direct action for positive change,
 in bold, clear, specific acts of solidarity, liberation, healing and compassion,
 readily sharing the good news of Jesus Christ...

...Transform us in the offering of ourselves
 so that we may be your partners in transformation
 to strive for the full, visible unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ,
 to become neighbours to all,
 as we await with eager longing the full revelation of your rule
 in the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

As I have said before, I believe that the twenty-first century will be a period of time in which spirituality will once more take centre stage in human lives. Your statement to the 9th

Assembly, phrased in the form of a prayer, is inspirational to us all and calls each of us to reflection and prayer and invites us to admit our own mistakes and imperfections.

And, with the assurance that we are forgiven in Christ, we are bold to echo the sentiments of the Message of the WCC's 1st Assembly in 1948:⁴

It is not in our power to banish sin and death from the earth, to create the unity of the Holy Catholic Church, to conquer the hosts of Satan. But it is within the power of God. God has given us at Easter the certainty that God's own purpose will be accomplished. But, by our acts of obedience and faith, we can on earth set up signs which point to the coming victory. Till the day of that victory our lives are hid with Christ in God, and no earthly disillusion or distress or power of hell can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

As those who wait in confidence and joy for their deliverance, let us give ourselves to those tasks which lie to our hands, and so set up signs that all may see.

And may the blessing of the Triune God be with us all, and remain with us always,

Samuel Kobia
Geneva 8 May 2006

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 369; altered for more gender-inclusive language.

ALTERNATIVE GLOBALIZATION ADDRESSING PEOPLE AND EARTH

AGAPE – A call to love and action

This document is the result of work on economic globalization from Harare to Porto Alegre. It was prepared by the commission for Justice, Peace and Creation under the direction of the central committee. Its final version was received by the executive committee in September 2005 which also approved the use of the document in the economic justice plenary.

Introduction

We, representatives of churches gathered at the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), emphasize that a world without poverty is not only possible but is in keeping with the grace of God for the world. This conviction builds on the rich tradition of ecumenical social thought and action, which is centred on God's option for the poor as an imperative of our faith. It captures the results of a seven-year global study process of the churches' responses to economic globalization with contributions from all regions of the world and involvement of a number of Christian world communions, particularly through the 2003 assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the 2004 general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) (see appendix).

This process has examined the project of economic globalization that is led by the ideology of unfettered market forces and serves the dominant political and economic interests. The international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization among other such institutions promote economic globalization. The participants in the AGAPE process shared their concerns about the growing inequality, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few and the destruction of the earth – all aggravating the scandal of poverty in the South and increasingly in the North. In recent years the escalating role of political and military power have strongly surfaced. People all over the world experience the impact of imperial forms of power on their communities.

Meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the home of the World Social Forum (WSF), we are encouraged by the constructive and positive message of the movements gathering in the WSF that alternatives are possible. We affirm that we can and must make a difference by becoming transformative communities caring for people and the earth.

We recognize that the divisions of the world are present among us. Since we are called to be one in Christ, we are called to be transformed by God's grace for the sake of all life on earth,

overcoming the world's division. Challenged to monitor and transform economic globalization, we call ourselves to action as churches working alongside people of faith communities and movements.

AGAPE Call – for love and action

God, Creator, endowing your creation with integrity and human beings with dignity;

God, Redeemer and Liberator, freeing us from slavery and death;

God, Holy Spirit, transforming and energizing us.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit let us witness to your love, life and transforming grace.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

We have become apathetic to suffering and injustice. Among us are many who suffer the consequences of economic globalization; women, abused and yet caring for life; children who are denied their rights; youth living in economic insecurity and unemployment; those labouring under exploitative conditions; the many caught in unjust trade relationships and debt slavery. There are people with disabilities and those living at the margins of society, people of colour often the first and most painfully hit by poverty, those pushed away and alienated from the land, the earth – battered, depleted and exploited. Denied of their sustenance, these people are often the most vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. We confess that many of us have failed to respond in solidarity.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

We are tempted to give in to comfort and its empty promises when we ought to choose costly discipleship and change. We are driven to accept oppression and suffering as a given, when we should keep our hope and advocate for justice and liberation.

We confess that many of us have failed to take a stand in our faith and act against economic injustice and its destructive consequences on people and the earth. We are tempted to give in to materialism and the reign of money. We play to the rules of greed and conform to political and military power when we should align ourselves with the poor and excluded people.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, we ask your forgiveness.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, let our economic structures be inspired by the rules of your household of life, governed by love, justice and grace.

Let us not be afraid of change, or to seek alternatives.

Let us work for justice by resisting destructive economic structures,

Proclaiming with hope the jubilee year of the Lord, the cancellation of debt, the release of the captives and rest for the land,
let us work for an agape economy of solidarity.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, you send us out,
to care for the earth and to share all what is necessary for life in community;
to resist and to denounce all that denies life,
to love our neighbours and to do what is just,
so that where there was death, there will be life.

We call each other

to respond to your love for all people and for the earth
in our own actions and in the witness and service of our churches;
to work for the eradication of poverty and the unconditional cancellation of debts;
to care for land, water, air – the entire web of life;
to build just and sustainable relationships with the earth.

In the world of labour, trade and finance to study and engage power in its different forms and manifestations, remembering that all power is accountable to you, God. God in your grace, help us to be agents of your transformation and to hear your call to act with courage.

All: Creator God, may the power of your grace transform us,

Christ, give us courage and hope to share our life with each other and the world,

Holy Spirit, empower us to work for justice for people and the earth.

God, in your grace, transform the world. Amen.

In the spirit of this uniting prayer, we challenge ourselves to have the courage to take action. The AGAPE call invites us to act together for transformation of economic injustice and to continue analyzing and reflecting on challenges of economic globalization and the link between wealth and poverty.

1. Poverty eradication

We recommit ourselves to work for the eradication of poverty and inequality through developing economies of solidarity and sustainable communities. We will hold our governments and the international institutions accountable to implement their commitments on poverty eradication and sustainability.

2. Trade

We recommit ourselves to work for justice in international trade relations through critical analyses on free trade and trade negotiations, and to collaborate closely with social movements in making those agreements just, equitable and democratic.

3. Finance

We recommit ourselves to campaign for responsible lending; unconditional debt cancellation and for the control and regulation of global financial markets. Investments should be redirected towards businesses that respect social and ecological justice, or in banks and institutions that do not engage in speculation, nor encourage tax evasion.

4. Sustainable use of land and natural resources

We recommit ourselves to engage in actions for sustainable and just patterns of extraction and use of natural resources, in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, who seek to protect their land, water and their communities.

We recommit ourselves to challenge the excessive consumption of affluent societies so that they will shift towards self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyles.

5. Public goods and services

We recommit ourselves to join the global struggle against the imposed privatization of public goods and services; and to actively defend the rights of countries and peoples to define and manage their own commons.

We recommit ourselves to support movements, groups and international initiatives defending vital elements of life such as bio-diversity, water and the atmosphere.

6. Life-giving agriculture

We recommit ourselves to work for land reforms in solidarity with landless agricultural labourers and small farm holders; to advocate in various ways for self-determination over food concerns. To oppose the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as trade liberalization as the sole directive. We commit ourselves to promote ecological farming practices and to stand in solidarity with peasant communities.

7. Decent jobs, emancipated work and people's livelihoods

We commit ourselves to build alliances with social movements and trade unions that advocate decent jobs and just wages. We commit ourselves to advocate for those workers and bonded labourers who work under exploitative conditions and are deprived of their rights to form trade unions.

8. Churches and the power of empire

We recommit ourselves to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God.

We acknowledge that the process of transformation requires that we as churches make ourselves accountable to the victims of the project of economic globalization. Their voices and experiences must determine how we analyse and judge this project, in keeping with the gospel. This implies that we as churches from different regions make ourselves accountable to each other, and that those of us closer to the centres of power live out our first loyalty to our sisters and brothers who experience the negative impacts of global economic injustice everyday of their lives.

This AGAPE call is a prayer for strength to transform unjust economic structures. It will guide our reflections and actions in the next phase of the ecumenical journey. Our engagement will build on the findings, proposals and recommendations to the churches from the AGAPE process as outlined in the AGAPE background document.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Presentation given at the Economic Justice Plenary

Wolfgang Huber

Bishop Dr Wolfgang Huber is Chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg and the Silesian Oberlausitz.

In recent days in Peshawar, a city in Pakistan, 70,000 people have been demonstrating against cartoons published in Copenhagen. The offices of a Norwegian mobile phone company there have been set on fire to demonstrate outrage against a Danish newspaper. These are alarming signs of the global reality in which we live. But it is also in Pakistan that more than 11,000 fair trade footballs for the World Cup in Germany are being produced for our church; some of these fair trade footballs have found their way to Porto Alegre. That's also a sign of the global reality in which we live. To what extent does the globalization of our world challenge us to readjust our trade according to the yardstick of justice? My introductory remarks concentrate on this issue.

Globalization has many aspects. One aspect is that hatred can be organized and spread throughout the world. But another aspect is that global humanitarian action for the victims of the tsunami around the Indian Ocean was organized within a few hours. Another aspect is that economic relations can promote prosperity and enable people to have decent work. But it also means that economic power can be organized selfishly, thereby standing in the way of economic justice. Anyone who wants to interpret the signs of the times needs to look at both sides: both the opportunities and the dangers of the current developments in the world.

We live in an age in which the world economy as a whole is growing, leading to an improvement in living standards, an increase in life expectancy, and improvement in levels of education in some parts of the world. But at the same time the blatant and inhumane poverty experienced by more than a billion people continues. The United Nations in its World Social Report makes it clear that in many parts of the world social inequalities are increasing. The natural foundations of life are being exploited in a way that is incompatible with the most basic requirements of sustainability. For all Christians increasing poverty in many part of our world is a scandal. For those of us in Europe, Africa and eastern Europe are two examples that challenge us particularly. Our Assembly directs our attention to the increasing

poverty in Latin America. Such a scandal will jolt us even more in that we, as no generation before us, have the possibility to overcome structural poverty and to make the world a more just place.

In issues of economic justice the Christian faith is not neutral. It does not conform to the economy's claim to be omnipotent; because its allegiance is to Christ as the only Lord of the world. It does not leave economic trade to follow its own laws, because it is based on God's commandment. Human dignity, human rights and social justice are basic values against which economic activity is to be measured both today and tomorrow. As Christians we judge the globalization of our world according to whether it promotes dignity of life, serves human freedom, and enables the expression of cultural diversity. That is why we name the injustices that are linked to current economic relationships of power.

A globalization worthy of its name includes everyone and does not divide humanity into winners and losers, into rich and poor. That is why we are mobilizing as a worldwide fellowship of churches linked by the prayer of Jesus, through the Lord's Prayer that includes the request for daily bread for everyone. In the World Council of Churches we are not a global player but a global prayer. It is through the power of prayer that we work for economic structures that benefit of all.

In recent days many Christians have been remembering Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the theologian of the Confessing Church in Germany who encouraged us as Christians to pray, to do justice, and to wait on God. A few days ago on 4th February we marked the 100th anniversary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's birth. The key experience that made him a Christian, as he himself acknowledged, was the encounter with the Sermon on the Mount. The corollary he wrote in a letter: "There are things for which an uncompromising stand is worthwhile. And it seems to me that peace and social justice, or Christ himself, are such things".

In the perspective of this commitment the economy is only part of life, not the whole of life. The debate about the issues linked to globalization should not be limited to economic aspects alone. As Christians and as representatives of the churches we must not surrender to the pervasive economic thought around us. Economic decisions do not create moral values. Solidarity cannot be created by the market. Economic justice is only possible only when civil society maintains its own independence and develops new strength. It can develop only when the state promotes the conditions for human solidarity and supports those who are weaker. Appropriate political conditions are needed to create social equality and promote social cohesion.

The ecumenical movement has been intensively discussing the process of globalization since the Harare assembly. This was inspired by the word "Agape", the word which means love for one's neighbour. Many people are now waiting for us to get beyond making statements,

to show that there are alternative possibilities for action. The key issue is how the biblical option for the poor can be related in a more meaningful way to economic thought. Young people in particular, including youth at this assembly, are clamouring for alternative perspectives for action to be developed that can be implemented and find resonance in the worldwide debate. Even Christians in positions of responsibility in the economy or international institutions are hoping to hear the voice of their churches. They want to be part of a globalization of justice and solidarity. I hope that this afternoon will serve this purpose.

Is there an Agape economy, an economy of love? That is what we have to discuss this afternoon. We will hear the perspectives of a theologian and of an economist. The theology part will be the first part and the economy part the last part of our session. Then we shall hear about three examples for alternative action in our churches. At the end of this plenary session is the Agape call that is intended to stimulate thought and action. But first we shall see a video about the ways in which the ecumenical movement in the past dealt with issues of economic justice and what answers it found.

Translated from the German by the WCC language service

THE ISLAND OF HOPE: AN ALTERNATIVE TO ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

Presentation given at the Economic Justice Plenary

Terauango Beneteri

*Ms Terauango Benti is the youth coordinator in the Kiribati Protestant Church Kiribati
Protestant.*

We, as the Pacific island churches wish to contribute the Pacific concept of the Island of Hope to the Assembly.

Pacifically, on the Island of Hope, life is significant, valued and celebrated. There is a celebration of life over material wealth. The Island of Hope is sacramental, self-contained, independent, and in tune with nature. It is an island marked by sharing and caring, to which people want to journey in order to celebrate life in all its fullness (Isa. 25:6). The Island of Hope has the “mana” (power) to draw human beings together.

The Island of Hope, like the Kingdom of God, is praise-worthy and unique, boundary-less and sought after.

Island of Hope is a reality of people together braving the attacks of religio-social, political and economic tyrannies.

The Island of Hope is biblical/theological and is inclusive of the idea of smallness in partnership uniting people and making them strong. Jesus is the Island of Hope who gave the whole world what it hopes for. Jesus’ passion and the cross (resurrection) is the Island of Hope for humanity.

As Pacific Islanders, there is awareness that the Island of Hope is not spared from the forces of globalization. Yet, in the face of its onslaught, the following defences remain firm and intact:

- The ethos of communal life and of communal economic and social relations.
- Communal ownership of resource bases.
- The strength of family and kinship ties.

- High levels of intra-community interaction and solidarity.
- A wealth of living languages and of ceremonies, rituals and other practices rich in meaning.
- Traditional structures like fale, bure-Kalou (house of worship) and material culture producing both functional and exchange or gift items.

The Island of Hope offers an alternative to the negative effects of globalization. The Island of Hope is founded on Godly values as opposed to economic globalization, which is erected on the value of material goods. The Island of Hope is sustainable, wholesome, peaceful and all-embracing, whereas globalization is unsustainable, damaging, conflict-ridden, and excluding.

The concept of the Island of Hope is not merely a dream. It is founded in reality and has been our normal life in our islands. The institutions and values embedded in the 'Island Of Hope may not create wealth on a massive scale but they will never be responsible for creating second class citizens, destroying the environment at will, causing poverty, the debasement of humanity and denial of human dignity, as economic globalization is doing.

- The Island of Hope will never entail economic tyranny.
- Spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are components of the concept of the Island of Hope which prioritizes relationships, celebrates quality of life and values human beings and creation over the production of things.
- The Island of Hope is an alternative to the project of economic globalization which entails domination through an unjust economic system.
- The Island of Hope represents life-centred values deeply rooted in Pacific communities, which provide an orientation for a just and sustainable economy and a life of dignity.

EMPIRE AND RELIGION GOSPEL, ECUMENISM AND PROPHECY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Presentation given at the Economic justice plenary

Nancy Cardoso Pereira

Rev. Dr Nancy Cardoso Pereira is a Methodist Pastor and a member of the Pastoral Land Commission. She is Professor of ancient history at the Porto Alegre Institute of the Methodist Church

When Janis Joplin sang in the distant 1960s, 'O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz,' it seemed a piece of harmless fun, but in a way it was a prophetic condemnation, in advance, of a trend in Western Christianity: voracious consumerism.

Today this spirituality of the market economy has taken complete possession of some sectors of Christianity, and prayers alternate between continuing to pray to God for a Mercedes Benz and, already in some cases, 'O Mercedes Benz, buy me a god!' or even, 'Mercedes Benz, be my god!' – as if material goods themselves could be the way to fullness of life.

The divine beings vying to bring 'our daily bread' to our tables feed not only on the total control of the processes of food production and distribution, but are also gobbling up the forms of consumption represented by quick-moving fast-food outlets. Today, world trade in agricultural products – especially cereals, meat and dairy products – is controlled by no more than twenty oligopolistic groups of transnational corporations located in the United States and Europe. 'Give us this day our daily bread, O Monsanto, Cargill, Swift, Anglo, ADM, Nestlé, Danone, Syngenta, Bunge!'

So, 'on earth as in heaven,' globalized capitalism in national capitals – an unfathomable metaphysical mystery – is punishing farmers in poor countries, whom they are treating as permanent debtors, while at the same time the debts of agriculture in rich countries are being cancelled in the form of subsidies, tariffs and free trade treaties – and there is no one who 'can deliver us from that evil.' The last WTO round in Hong Kong showed that the

farming capitals in the United States and Europe will not be 'led into temptation' and will continue to defend the interests of their agricultural, industrial and service sectors. The peasant workers of Korea, India and Brazil, and other countries, know that the governments negotiating in Hong Kong had no legitimacy to negotiate on their behalf.

Capitalist transnational corporations want more: they want 'the kingdom, the power and the glory' by controlling the land, water and seed stocks. They are already lords of other people's work. They now control and determine the monetary value of their livelihood and their actual lives. 'Hallowed be the name' of patents and technologies that make inroads into people's inner being, their possibilities and their vulnerability, and then make fresh profits out of medicines, chemical products, biological products and genetically modified products.

'Hallowed be the name' of the business campaigns that declare themselves to be environmentally friendly, community-building, child-friendly, educational sponsors who by complex sleight of hand attempt to disguise the voracious appetite of the profit motive. False NGOs, promotional moral talk, funding of campaigns and community initiatives, with no questions asked about profits or motives.

Regardless of life, war fulfils its role of ensuring access to cheap materials and labour, of expanding and protecting markets for capital's consuming hunger and its passion to enslave. Money passionately loves profits and will not tolerate any obstacle, restriction or regulation. 'My kingdom come!' cries capital, seated on its divine throne at the heart of the world, making itself out to be god.

In the pride of its heart, capital says, "I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas." You think you are wise... and no secret is hidden from you. By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries. By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud ... You think you are wise, as wise as a god ... Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence and you sinned ... Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour ... By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries' (Ezekiel 28: 2-6; 16-18).

Ezekiel's prophecy is forceful and amounts to saying simply and directly, 'You are only human! You are not God!'

Who today knows how or is able to produce such theology and prophecy?

Who is able to condemn and combat this spiritual aura conferred on a social phenomenon, this illusion that things, that economic systems are natural or eternal? The dominant economic system becomes before our eyes no longer a historical social phenomenon: rather the world and its beings, personal relationships and human creations become commodities; busi-

ness takes on an impetus and existence of its own that cannot be questioned, a movement that sweeps us along to perpetuate inequality and violence, without our even realizing it. The economy and economic relationships rule humankind, instead of being seen and appreciated as the product of humankind in history, and for that reason capable of being overcome, criticized and reinvented.

Our theologies and pastoral policies are tired and exhausted. The economic system has taken over Western religious language, leaving more or less generous margins for the churches that have before them the easiest option, which is to become an integral functional part of the whole package presented by capitalism, offering religious goods as commodities, and services in the form of powerful fundamentalisms and charismatic spectacles of marketing and prosperity.

We need to choose the difficult option and learn to say again, 'By your many sins and dishonest trade, you have desecrated your sanctuaries' (Ezek. 28:18). The world and its living beings, peoples and their cultures, the earth, water and seeds – everything that moves is sacred! And no economic system that produces injustice and dishonest dealing can be blessed or legitimized or tolerated in the name of God.

The gospels, the Law and the prophets, which are accepted in our Christian tradition, demand that we confess God throughout the inhabited world – the oikoumene – but that we give that confession concrete form, in the struggle for law and justice as the full accomplishment of the world and our humanity.

However, the theology that we are doing today is sterile, because it attempts to hide behind systematic exegetical generalizations that fail to name, choose, opt, state preferences, take a stand, refute, be outraged, condemn or resist.

At the beginning of all things, the world order was divided into sky, water and land, setting up relationships within the whole created world: weather, night and day; dry land and water; land creatures and the birds of the air; living beings in their animal and plant forms.

'Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so' (Gen. 1:11).

So God said, 'Let them live!' and all came to life, as an exercise in similarities and differences, as question and response, consecutively or simultaneously. Everything is alive and everything is good.

The whole book of Genesis examines again and again the issue of the highly delicate relationships between living creatures and the constraints placed on them by land, water and fire; between the constraints placed on the earth, on the plants and on the beasts, and the human mouth and its hunger. The hunger of the world, the hunger of the human body pro-

duces new relationships within the created world. Hunger produces contemplation, observation, work and its technologies. Hunger is the world's yearning, the longing for more, for life. It is hunger that establishes the critical creative relationship between living beings and their surrounding environment. And God saw that it was good.

Starting with this ordering of creation the text goes on to emphasise the essential but difficult relationships between the physical world and its vegetation and human bodies and their hunger. The book of Genesis describes crisis situations of food shortages at the beginning of the narratives of the wanderings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Going to Egypt is always represented as a consequence of a shortage of food:

'Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe' (Gen. 12:10).

In the following narrative, we read that 'The land could not support them' (Gen. 13:6), giving limited access to resources for survival as a reason for remaining in small family groups engaged in animal husbandry. Thus human groups and their memories are also marked by issues of food insecurity within the wider framework of the farming and land policies of empires.

In this context the story of Cain and Abel is fundamental. The text recalls different ways of life and work and relationships with God. Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain tilled the soil. That is the one piece of information that we are given: two different ways of organizing people's relationship with the earth, work and relationships with other people.

The offering is made. Cain offers the fruits of the soil as his offering and Abel offers some of his animals: fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. God looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but God did not look with favour on Cain and his offering. Simply that. Various explanations have been given to explain this situation. Why did God prefer Abel and his offering?

The gauchos here in Rio Grande do Sul would like to interpret this story by seeing God as a gaucho whose favourite food was a barbecue, but perhaps we ought to look elsewhere for alternative interpretations!

I take it to be possible that this text recalls two ways of life, two ways of organizing work and relationships in antiquity. If Cain represents agriculture, he should be seen as part of an economic system of exploitation based on forced labour and tribute, probably in the setting of the city-states in Canaan under Egyptian influence.

Abel would thus represent human groups engaged together in different economic activities that were not the monopoly of the city-states with their tribute and forced labour. Abel, the keeper of sheep, would be found among the Canaanite population of the high plateau, who resisted and survived on the basis of smallholdings, nomadic sheep-rearing, the activities of

bands of mercenaries or groups involved in trading, either as merchants or carriers of merchandise.

The significant fact is that God chooses, elects, prefers the latter way of life to the former. That explains the conflict. Cain is angry and his face downcast. God says, 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door... You must master it' (Gen. 4: 6-7).

This description of the two offerings could mask the violence, hiding the wild beast... If only God would accept both offerings! But the God in this narrative refuses to legitimize the offering that is the fruit of violence and sin. Cain comes out of the ritual offering with his face downcast. He has been rejected. No. Cain is incapable of mastering the violence inherent in his way of life, because it is systemic violence. That is the function of the ritual act: it assesses, scrutinizes, sheds light on production methods, and it opts, states a preference.

Cain cannot cope with living without divine approval. He invites Abel out into the country – and, in the final definition, that is what it is all about: land! Cain kills Abel. Simply that. Apparently, Cain decided to kill Abel because he, Cain, had been rejected by God. Seen in that way... God could be to blame!

Or, rather... the violence against Abel was already an integral part of Cain's offering and that is why it was not pleasing to God. Cain's way of life and production involved denying life to Abel and to other human groups with him. That is why Cain's offering was rejected.

Offerings do not simply offer themselves. The function of religion in economic exchange does not consist of establishing regulations and procedures, but of determining value, i.e. formulating economic values, shaping structures and strengthening assessment mechanisms.

This ritual exchange or offering contains the cultural mechanism for calculating value, i.e. what can be given and exchanged and what is kept and retained. It is not the intrinsic value of beings or things that determines the difference between what is retained and what is acceptable in the form of an offering, but it is society that confers value and produces the scale by which to measure the meaning and function of ritual exchanges.

God reappears in the narrative, asking the key question, 'Where is your brother?'

Cain's reply is well known, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?'

God replies, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground.'

It is one of the most probing narratives in our tradition. It is a dialogue between God and the violent brother and the other brother who, as a victim of violence, is speaking in the form of blood spilt on the ground.

For some reason or other, this narrative has remained dormant in our theologies. This radical understanding of a God who prefers, who discriminates, who chooses, has given way before a co-opted theology that no longer knows how to ask the difficult questions. It is a community life that no longer sees itself as a space where life is assessed and true worth established.

Alas for us! God is no longer asking, 'Where is your brother?' We have made a god who whispers sweet messages of forgiveness and reconciliation, without the critical courage that makes the violent bow their heads in shame, unable to claim any human or divine qualities. They are cornered wild beasts prepared to destroy!

This god is no longer able to hold a conversation with the ground. This god now does not hear the cry of the blood of people and beings who are being downtrodden by an economic model that knows no limits, accepts no regulation and brooks no opposition.

On the periphery of world Christianity there are minorities who stress the need for a theology that liberates: that liberates God, and the earth, and the men and women whose humanity is being denied every day by capitalism. This World Council of Churches has been a privileged and sensitive space where voices can be raised that are not heard in our countries, in national churches or in regional councils. Men and women who no longer wish to repeat again and again the North American and European theology that ceaselessly pores over itself and its dearly loved theologians, what they have said, what they have written. Throughout the world young theologians are silenced by a dominant North American and European theological model that is weary of becoming good news, that is cosy up to the knowledge industry in the service of an economic model which gives privileged place to its comfortable, stable consumerist societies.

They no longer want to know about a God who asks questions, who causes the powerful to bow their heads in shame and encourages the weak to announce the Kingdom of Justice. They no longer ask after their brothers and sisters, because they have created NGOs and agencies that fund works of charity but do not ask questions about the system.

The blood crying out from the ground becomes a case study, an experience mentioned in the course of the liturgy, but it does provoke the anger that refuses to continue to tolerate ways of life and production based on violence and inequality.

Together with many brothers and sisters here in this space I have learned not to refrain from asking these questions. I have learned with brothers and sisters from different churches and different countries to organize campaigns and efforts to opt constantly for a way of life and production based on justice that will enable us to walk with straight backs, open minds and tranquil hearts.

This Assembly must acknowledge and identify its tasks so as to commit our churches to take up again a prophetic evangelical stance in the world. 'No one can serve two masters,' said Jesus. It is either God or money, life or death and all the difficult issues contained in that question, 'Where is your brother? Where is your sister?'

We need to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches, what the Spirit is saying through the blood spilt on the ground, through our brothers and sisters not present here! We need to listen to the earth, to learn to engage in conversation with the blood of people who are being destroyed.

We need to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the empires of this world: 'You are not God. Bow your heads in shame.' Let the wild beasts be mastered: Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, Monsanto, Cargill, Swift, Anglo, ADM, Nestlé, Danone, Syngenta, Bunge.

We are not motivated by an all-embracing missionary project for the whole world. Our passion comes from what we learn in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and from our lively faith, which is able to live with differences without being afraid of being destroyed or disappearing.

The faith that affirms God's grace in the building of another possible world is not like the strength and wealth of the successful but is like an adventure of love, caring for life, for the world, for ourselves.

'As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything' (2 Cor. 6: 4-10).

Translated from the Portuguese by the WCC language service

POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES: THE NEED FOR NEW MORALS IN ECONOMY

Presentation given at the economic justice plenary

Vsevolod Chaplin

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin of the Russian Orthodox Church is deputy chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

After the demise of the totalitarian Communist system the economic and social life in the countries of the former Soviet Union found itself in the hands of radical neo-liberal reformers and their Western advisers. The initial public support to these people's policies was almost unanimous: the USSR population knew very well all the disadvantages of the state-controlled, absolutely centralized and heavily militarized totalitarian economy which suppressed any independent initiative. The idea of free market's "omnipotence" in solving not only economic, but also political and social problems, occupied the public space in the beginning of 1990s.

Unfortunately, the results of unwise policies of radical neo-liberals proved very soon to be dramatic. Dozens of millions of people, including young and energetic ones, started to live below the poverty level. Their savings turned into nothing, many of them lost jobs or were paid only symbolic salaries. The Soviet social system which guaranteed for many people a predictable future started to gradually disappear. Alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide became widespread. Social marginalization (e.g., the number of street children) reached levels unknown since the Civil War of 1917-1923.

At the same time many economic players started to "preach" unlimited wealth and moral cynicism in the context of absolute poverty of millions. Several families who started to "own" post-Soviet countries as a result of questionable privatization of state properties, pretended to hold the political power as well. One of their representatives said on TV: "Population doesn't matter"; another one – "I can elect even a monkey president here". In the eyes of many simple people the very word "economy" became a sort of synonym to crime, injustice, manipulation and oppression. Schoolchildren, when asked about their plans for the future,

were naming “prostitute” and “gangster” among the most prestigious professions. The very idea of economic ethics was declared outdated and linked to the Communist past. Still, at the turn of the new century many economic actors started to realize that economy without ethics is not only immoral, but also counterproductive.

The Russian Orthodox Church uniting many dozen million Christians in different post-Soviet countries and other regions of the world has raised its voice many times against economic injustice in 1990s and 2000s. Its leadership spoke to the state power, the businessmen and the common people, criticizing late payments of salaries, unemployment, inadequate monetization of social benefits and many other phenomena which brought suffering to our compatriots.

In February 2004, at the initiative of my Church, the World Russian People’s Sobor (Assembly) adopted The Code of Moral Principles and Rules in Economy, which was offered to the state, entrepreneurs and workers. Although it doesn’t speak direct Christian language (the document was later supported by Jews, Moslems and Buddhists), the Code is based on the Ten Commandments of the Bible. Allow me to quote just several paragraphs from this document.

Historically the Russian spiritual and moral tradition has been inclined predominantly to give priority to the spiritual over the material, the ideal of personal selflessness for the sake of the good of the people. However, the extremes of this option would lead to terrible tragedies. Remembering this, we should establish such an economic order as to help realize in a harmonious way both spiritual aspirations and the material interests of both the individual and society.

The greater one’s property is the more powerful one is over others. Therefore, the use of property in economy should not be of narrow egoistic nature and should not contradict the common interest... Poverty just as richness is a test. A poor person is obliged to behave in a dignified way, to seek to make his work effective, to raise his professional skills so that he may come out of his misery.

Political power and economic power should be separated. The participation of business in politics and its impact on public opinion should be open and transparent. The entire financial support given by business to political parties, public organizations and the mass media should be made public and verifiable. Any secret support is to be condemned publicly as immoral.

Individuals and structures guilty of grievous crimes, especially those involved in corruption, should be unacceptable as business partners or participants in the business community... Those who fail to pay salaries, who delay them systematically and allow them to stay below the subsistence wage are to be censured by society.

Now the Russian Orthodox Church is working to promote and implement this Code. It was well received by several economy-related state institutions, leaders of nation-wide trade

unions. Several big companies (for example, financial corporation Sistema, Itera oil company and Ingosstrakh insurance company), have indicated that they will follow in their activities the rules and principles mentioned in our document. The Code was widely discussed by researchers, journalists as well as broader public. Some criticised the Church for "interfering in non-religious area". But I am deeply convinced that it is the task of the Church to call and work for moral renewal, truth and justice in the economy.

THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION PROJECT

Presentation given at the Economic Justice Plenary

Vera Araújo

*Professor Veronica Araújo coordinates the work of the Focolare Movement's Centre for Dialogue
with Culture*

Mr General Secretary, Dr Samuel Kobia,

Honourable Delegates from all over the world,

Allow me first of all to convey Chiara Lubich's greetings, the foundress of the Focolare Movement whom I am here to represent.

Since she could not be here as she so desired, she assures you of her prayers and best wishes for the success of this Assembly.

My task is that of briefly outlining the project referred to as the Economy of Communion, born within the sphere of the Focolare Movement from an inspiration that Chiara Lubich had while travelling here in Brazil in May 1991.

While staying at the small city of witness of the Focolare close to São Paulo, Chiara was directly exposed to the social-economic inequity of this immense nation. She was informed that numerous members of the Movement lived in the *favelas* of many Brazilian cities, immersed in poverty and want. The communion of goods that had been practised among the members of the Movement since its inception was no longer enough to cover the basic needs of many of them.

After living days marked by a high spiritual climate and great brotherhood among people of different social backgrounds, she then had an inspiration: to give life to businesses, entrusting their management to competent people who would run them efficiently and render them profitable. Then – and herein lies the novelty – these profits would be divided into three parts: the first part for those in need; the second for the formation of *new people*, that is, people oriented to the culture of giving and inspired by it for their economic endeavours, because without such people, it is impossible to build a new society. And finally, the third part would be invested in the business, to strengthen and further develop it.

It was a simple idea, linear and very innovative because it introduces on the economic plane the principle of gift, of gratuity.

Today there are about 750 business that follow the principles of the Economy of Communion (EOC) worldwide. In responding to their primary mission to help the poor, every year they share their profits and thus alleviate many people's needs, providing employment for them, helping them rediscover the dignity that they had lost or never experienced.

This initiative is managed by a central commission that compiles the requests of needs and distributes the profits to those people, through the help of the directors of the Focolare Movement throughout the world. The people who receive them are also committed to living the culture of giving and mutual love.

This is a new way of giving: it is not a matter of philanthropy or social benefits, but of living in communion with the poor through the shared brotherhood experienced among the business members and those who are disadvantaged.

Then, in these 15 years, we have understood and experienced that the EOC project, in embracing the principles of the spirituality of unity of the Focolare as values to be lived out in concrete economic activity, is now developing its own method of business management. This practical experience has germinated guiding principles of a technical-ethical nature with which to orient business practice towards social co-responsibility, the mentality of giving.

These businesses, while operating in the current "for profit" market, function with a different logic than the traditional market model insofar as they follow a logic of sharing and communion.

Industrial parks have grown around the small cities of witness of the Movement as further developments of the EOC in these years. These parks give visibility to the project, bringing different firms together who have mutual love at the core of their business dealings, giving each other advice, supporting one another ... Seven of these industrial parks have already been built, in several nations: three in Brazil; one, respectively, in Argentina, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy.

Chiara Lubich has received two honorary degrees in economics as a result of this project. Many scholars are beginning to deepen new ideas that emerge from these businesses, such as the concept of relational goods, trust, communion, and so on.

Many people are asking how businesses that are so attentive to anthropological and ethical issues can actually survive in our current market. I will let Chiara respond to that question: "In this type of business, one leaves room for God's intervention even in its concrete economic management. One then experiences that with each decision made counter-culturally

to normal business practice, He never fails to send that hundredfold that Christ had promised: perhaps in the form of an unexpected revenue, a new window of opportunity, the support derived from new collaborations, an idea for a new product, and so on.”¹

This then, in brief, is the Economy of Communion Project which is raising considerable interest in the business sector and academic circles.

¹ C. LUBICH, *The experience of the Economy of Communion: from spirituality a new proposal for business practice*. Report given during the Conference organized by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, titled “Market economy, democracy and solidarity: a space for comparison?”

MESSAGE FROM THE ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Presentation given at the Economic Justice Plenary

Juan Somavia

Mr Juan Somavia, from Chile, is Director General of the International Labour Organization in Geneva. This address was given in French at the assembly by Dominique Peccoud S.J. who works at the ILO as a special advisor to the Director General on the relations between philosophical, spiritual and religious values, and with the ILO's Decent Work strategy and programmes. He also oversees relations between the ILO and Civil Society Organizations, and is the ILO liaison to the Vatican and other religious organizations such as the World Council of Churches.

Dear friends,

Please allow me to address you in these familiar terms, in view of the solid and long-standing relations between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Even before the Second World War, the ILO enjoyed close ties with those who were preparing the birth of the WCC. As you are well aware, they wished to give all Christian churches, gathered within a single institution, greater visibility and weight in social and political discussions and action to guide world development towards greater Justice and Peace.

As time has passed, these relations have continued to strengthen.

Shortly after my arrival at the ILO, Konrad Raiser and I very quickly understood that we were pursuing the same objective: how could we, together, respond more effectively to the calls of the poorest and most vulnerable in the world?

If we take the time to listen to them, we can see that, over and above emergency relief, what they are seeking and calling for is work: work which associates them with the creation of our world; work which gives just access to its resources; work which respects and ensures respect for their human dignity as men and women with sufficient income to bring up their children in dignity; or, in short, Decent Work.

Several of the subjects that you are covering are directly related to the ILO's concerns.

The first is violence, and particularly "Youth overcoming violence". If youth is to contribute its full capacities to this cause, it has to be properly educated. Yet today too many children

are compelled too early in their lives to earn their livelihood or that of their families in mines, domestic work outside their own homes and in many other activities. All their innate creativity is thus condemned to remain unfulfilled. Worse still, vulnerable and exposed, they are at risk of being the first to be affected by the violence which so often coexists with deep-rooted poverty.

The ILO's most important cooperation programme is concerned with the eradication of child labour. Moreover, at the Millennium Summit, the Heads of State emphasized the need to find decent and productive work for young people. In this context, the ILO has been called upon to take the lead in a Youth Employment Network, in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the United Nations and the World Bank. Already, 19 countries have committed themselves at the highest level to implementing a national action plan on youth employment.

A second theme that you are addressing is Economic justice, in relation to which you affirm that "A world without poverty is possible". In 2003, my report to the International Labour Conference set out the same convictions under the title "Working out of poverty". The ILO has since engaged in many efforts at the global, regional and national levels to show how whole communities can escape from poverty through decent work. At the United Nations Summit held in September 2005 in New York, the Heads of State recognized and called for the expansion of these efforts in their final statement, emphasizing the link between the sustainable reduction of poverty and the creation of decent work.

One joint activity by our two institutions was directed by Sam Kobia of the World Council of Churches and relates perfectly to the third theme of your Assembly on religious plurality. We undertook an in-depth examination of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda from the viewpoint of all the major philosophical and spiritual traditions underlying the principal cultures in an attempt to give meaning to genuinely humane development for each and every person within our common humanity. We established a very diversified inter-cultural group of women and men from the world over, which engaged in highly productive exchanges over a period of one year. The convergence of views, enriched by the specificities of the various traditions, are set out in a joint work published by the ILO and the World Council of Churches: "Philosophical and spiritual perspectives on decent work". This work emphasizes the importance of developing, above and beyond face-to-face, and sometimes confrontational inter-denominational dialogue, collaborative side-by-side dialogue in which everyone joins together in trying to respond to a pressing topical issue. This type of discussion gives rise to vigorous consensus, which is clarified and enriched by the differences added by each participant in response to practical issues.

Once again, in our common advance, we can see the extent to which the major concerns of the WCC meet those of the ILO. That is why we accepted with great pleasure your invita-

tion to be present in Porto Alegre. I would have most willingly attended in person, had my obligations in relation to the Maritime Conference not required my presence in Geneva. But I felt it important that Dominique Peccoud should represent our organization during the whole of your Assembly and a CD-ROM has been produced for all participants containing a number of documents on the three subjects of your debates.

Our struggle to attain greater social justice which gives practical recognition to the dignity of each individual is as legitimate as it is difficult. Our collaboration has been productive for both our organizations. Together, we can hope to achieve objectives which it would be impossible to attain separately. The ILO today needs your support in its combat to create more job opportunities that are synonymous with human dignity. In response to your prayer "God, in your grace, transform the world", there can be no doubt that the first gift that he is ready to accord us is that of working together. Just as you can count on the availability of the ILO, I count on you to support our organization's action for decent work. Thank you.

WEALTH AND POVERTY: CHALLENGE TO CHURCHES

Presentation to the economic justice plenary

Yash Tandon

Professor Yash Tandon, from Uganda, is an economist. He is presently Associate Research Fellow at the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies and Director of the Southern African Trade Information and Negotiations Initiative, which is a project of the International South Group Network and aims to help build Africa's capacity to take a more effective part in the global trading system.

The greatest challenge of our time is the increasing disparity between wealth and poverty both between and within nations. The chasm between the poor and the rich is widening. From the monetary measure over 3 billion people are classified as poor living on less than 2 dollars a day. This is 50% of the global population. The neoliberal approach in economics, particularly how trade and finance is handled globally, is responsible for this human tragedy.

Global inequality has grown exponentially. The ratio between the richest and the poorest 20% of the world's population was 30:1 in 1960, and 114:1 in 2002. If this is not addressed, humanity risks gross social and political chaos unprecedented in world history. Ecologically, we are destroying our mother earth to a degree never experienced before. Churches and social movements have alerted the world over and over again, but actors of corporate globalization have decided not to heed this warning. Instead, the driving forces of economic globalization continue to promote more growth without limits. One country which has 5% of the world's population consumes a quarter of the world's oil. Global trade is dominated by corporations. They pay lip service to poverty eradication and the protection of public goods and the environment. Profits, not public welfare, are their *raison d'être*.

If we all go down this road, we shall need seven more planets like ours. This Assembly comes at the right time. We are at the crossroads between continuing to live or die with our earth. I therefore challenge the churches who are a custodian of ethics and morals, I believe, to show the way of promoting a just and participatory world, where resources can be shared and the earth cared. We need a world without poverty and this should be possible if we rethink the way we consume, produce and distribute resources.

Neoliberal development paradigm – the curse of our times

The AGAPE document which I have read defines neoliberalism. You need to say loud and clear that the free market system is a myth – it never existed, nor will it ever. It is in truth an ideology of the corporations paraded as “science of economics” by the neoliberals. They are a kind of sect in the academic community that are employed in large numbers by global trade and financial institutions, major universities in North and South, and most finance ministries in third world countries. They use a one-size-fit formula as their development paradigm. In the Greek legend, the bandit robber, Procrustes, used to waylay travellers and chop their legs if these did not fit into a “one-size-fit” bed. It may be said with justification that the neoliberal economists are the “Procrustean economists” of our time; they chop the legs of poor nations when they do not conform to their economic programmes. The poor in the South are these chopped legs that do not fit the one-size-fit formula of the neoliberal economists.

Malaysia, to give one example, has been able to develop better than larger countries like Indonesia and the Philippines. Why? Because Malaysia made its own policies, often in defiance of the IMF and the World Bank and the neoliberal economists. Most of Africa, on the other hand, has adopted neoliberal strategies as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes and Africa is the worst suffering continent. In Latin America, on the other hand, things are changing. Argentina followed the neoliberal strategy with dedication in the 1980s and 90s. Then came the financial crash in November 2001, and the country imploded like a powder keg. The present government negotiated with the IMF and got away with writing off 75% of the debt. The IMF could do nothing about it. In Venezuela the people, in popular elections, overthrew the ruling oligarchy, and declared a Bolivarian revolution, and took control of the nation’s resources. In Bolivia, they are doing the same – taking control of the nation’s oil and gas resources.

Where do we go from here? Reasons for hope in the future

The challenge to the churches is to offer to the people alternatives to Neoliberalism. They do not have to go far. People everywhere are engaged in working out their own partial solutions out of their experiments in survival strategies. These have to be acknowledged, made more systematic, and given support, but in a different environment. For example, credit institutions for people’s self-help projects have been tried by the thousands all over the third world. But they have failed to lift people out of poverty. Why? Because the environment was not conducive. Within the reigning capitalist framework, these self-help projects simply got absorbed in the dominant patterns of production and finance.

So the foremost challenge of our epoch is to change the whole edifice of global production and exchange. In order to do this, the churches have to work at various levels:

- A. At the global political and ideological level;
- B. At the national and regional levels;
- C. At the level of the people on the ground.

Starting at ground zero, people are learning from the past, and taking matters in their own hands. Against Thatcher's famous dictum that There is No Alternative (TINA), people are saying There Are Hundreds of Alternatives (TAHA). People are experimenting with creating their own currencies, or exchanging goods and services using the barter system. They are pooling their labour together to build boreholes and damming rivers to generate electricity. They are growing food in abandoned lands to fight against hunger and poverty, collecting waste products and turning them into assets for survival. They are now even taking to politics, and putting in power their own leaders who will respond to their demand for a total overhaul of the national and global system of production and ownership as well as distribution and welfare systems.

At the national and regional level, some Latin American and Asian countries are defying the IMF and the neoliberal orthodoxy. The churches have to support such acts of unilateral defiance by the nations and regions of the South. Argentina paid only 25% of its external debt and got away with it. In Bolivia the people are taking control of their natural resources. For Africa, the Bolivarian type revolution could be a start. But it may not be enough. Africa may have to seriously contemplate active disengagement from globalization in a sequenced selected manner, and then, once they build African unity within sub-regions and continentally, negotiate its re-entry into the global system from a position of strength. The churches in Africa may have to look at this possibility seriously. Already, an innovative section of the trade unions in the SADC region has launched a movement called ANSA – Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Southern Africa. They have a ten-point programme on an alternative strategy that the churches may want to study and support.

At the global level, there is now a paradigmatic confrontation between the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Social Forum (WSF), or what may be described as the "development camp", and the "free trade" camp. The latter believe that the objective of development is best served through giving free rein to the forces of the market, and creating conditions in which each country engages in international trade on the basis of its comparative advantage. This position has been challenged for the last twenty years, and now there is enough evidence on the ground that contrary to the self-perception of the free market theorists, they are actually anti development. The practical effects of their policies lead to the negation of development, and the creation of extreme wealth on one side and extreme poverty on the other. In 2001, here in Porto Alegre, began a process that challenged the rich people's club at Davos in Switzerland. As opposed to looking at the world from the per-

spective of those in citadels of power and privilege (which is what Davos does), the Porto Alegre process does so from the perspective of the marginalized and disempowered people of the world.

Where governments and intergovernmental organisations – even including the United Nations – are still bogged down in discredited theories of the past, some church organizations such as Christian Aid, and secular organisations such as Oxfam are taking the lead to draw attention to the inequities of the system, and challenging neoliberal theories that are servicing the greed of corporations. But these efforts are still in the margins of society. They have to become mainstream. The churches are positioned well in society to make this happen.

Some people and institutions in the North are realizing that the problem of poverty is not confined to the South. Globalization, and with it the erosion of social welfare in Europe and America, is creating a new wave of the unemployed, a new generation of the poor in the North as well. Furthermore, the South's poor are jumping walled fences across the Rio Grande in Mexico, and crossing from Africa to Europe over land and sea, half of them perishing on the way or exploited by unscrupulous agents who all want to get rich. The minorities from the South in the North are becoming the racial and religious underclass that is threatening the peace and prosperity of Western nations. At the same time, the wanton exploitation of the soil, minerals, forests, seas, oceans, mountains, wild-life, all this for the greed of corporations, is creating a doomsday scenario for the world.

The warning that the time bomb is ticking has been sounded a thousand times before. These have been either largely ignored, or palliatives thrown at some problems, such as making corporations responsible to the poor and to the environment. These have not worked; these will not work. The world needs a more thorough-going transformation of the way it is organizing life on this planet – the only planet we have.

I hope that from here the churches will go with two messages: how to deliver the world from the curse of neoliberalism, and how to strengthen the hundreds of alternatives (TAHA) of the people for a different world. In the words of the World Social Forum: Another World is Possible! We can make it!

TEXT ON ECCLESIOLOGY CALLED TO BE THE ONE CHURCH

An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to
the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue

WCC Assemblies have adopted texts offering a vision, or identifying the qualities, of “the unity we seek”.¹ In line with these texts the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre has adopted this text inviting the churches to continue their journey together, as a further step towards full visible unity.

The purpose of this Invitation to the Churches is two-fold: (a) to reflect what the churches, at this point on their ecumenical journey, can say together about some important aspects of the Church; and (b) to invite the churches into a renewed conversation - mutually supportive, yet open and searching – about the quality and degree of their fellowship and communion, and about the issues which still divide them.²

I

1. We, the delegates to the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, give thanks to the Triune God, Father; Son and Holy Spirit, who has brought our churches into living contact and dialogue. By God’s grace we have been enabled to remain together, even when this has not been easy. Considerable efforts have been made to overcome divisions. We are “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”.³ We reaffirm that “the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order

¹ The present Invitation to the Churches was produced at the request of the Central Committee of the WCC (2002), in a process organized by the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission. A first draft was written at a meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus in March 2004; this was revised (on the basis of extensive comments received from WCC governing bodies, the Faith and Order Commission, and the Steering Committee of the Special Commission) at a second meeting in Nicosia in May, 2005. Faith and Order extends on behalf of the WCC its appreciation to the Church of Cyprus, which graciously hosted these preparatory meetings. A final revision took place at the Faith and Order Standing Commission meeting in Aghios Nikolaos, Crete, in June 2005.

² To assist this process, Faith and Order has produced and sent to the churches a new Study Document, “The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement”, Faith and Order Paper No. 198.

³ Basis, WCC (Constitution, I).

that the world may believe".⁴ Our continuing divisions are real wounds to the body of Christ, and God's mission in the world suffers.

2. Churches in the fellowship of the WCC remain committed to one another on the way towards *full visible unity*. This commitment is a gift from our gracious Lord. Unity is both a divine gift and calling. Our churches have affirmed that the unity for which we pray, hope, and work is "a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation".⁵ Such *koinonia* is to be expressed in each place, and through a conciliar relationship of churches in different places. We have much work ahead of us as together we seek to understand the meaning of unity and catholicity, and the significance of baptism.

II

3. We confess one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). The Church's oneness is an image of the unity of the Triune God in the communion of the divine Persons. Holy scripture describes the Christian community as the body of Christ whose interrelated diversity is essential to its wholeness: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4-7).⁶ Thus, as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to manifest its *oneness in rich diversity*.

4. The Church as communion of believers is created by the Word of God, for it is through hearing the *proclamation of the gospel* that faith, by the action of His Holy Spirit, is awakened (Rom. 10:17). Since the good news proclaimed to awaken faith is the good news handed down by the apostles, the Church created by it is *apostolic*. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets the Church is God's household, a *holy* temple in which the Holy Spirit lives and is active. By the power of the Holy Spirit believers grow into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2. 21-22).⁷

⁴ Purposes and Functions, WCC (Constitution, III).

⁵ "The Unity of the Church as *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling", The Canberra Statement, 2.1.

⁶ The scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁷ The Nature and Mission of the Church, § 23.

5. We affirm that the apostolic faith of the Church is one, as the body of Christ is one. Yet there may legitimately be different formulations of the faith of the Church. The life of the Church as new life in Christ is *one*. Yet it is built up through different charismata and ministries. The hope of the Church is one. Yet it is expressed in different human expectations. We acknowledge that there are different ecclesiological starting points, and a range of views on the relation of the Church to the churches. Some differences express God's grace and goodness; they must be discerned in God's grace through the Holy Spirit. Other differences divide the Church; these must be overcome through the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love so that separation and exclusion do not have the last word. God's "plan for the fullness of time [is] to gather up all things in him" (Eph. 1:10), reconciling human divisions. God calls his people in love to discernment and renewal on the way to the fullness of *koinonia*.

6. The *catholicity* of the Church expresses the fullness, integrity, and totality of its life in Christ through the Holy Spirit in all times and places. This mystery is expressed in each community of baptized believers in which the apostolic faith is confessed and lived, the gospel is proclaimed, and the sacraments are celebrated. Each church is the Church catholic and not simply a part of it. Each church is the Church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches. We affirm that the catholicity of the Church is expressed most visibly in sharing holy communion and in a mutually recognized and reconciled ministry.

7. The relationship among churches is dynamically interactive. Each church is called to mutual giving and receiving gifts and to *mutual accountability*. Each church must become aware of all that is provisional in its life and have the courage to acknowledge this to other churches. Even today, when eucharistic sharing is not always possible, divided churches express mutual accountability and aspects of catholicity when they pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work together for justice, reconciliation, and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say "I have no need of you" (1 Cor.12:21). Apart from one another we are impoverished.

III

8. All who have been baptized into Christ are united with Christ in his body: "Therefore we have been buried with him by *baptism* into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). In baptism, the Spirit confers Christ's holiness upon Christ's members. Baptism into union with Christ calls churches to be open and honest with one another, even when doing so is difficult: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Baptism bestows upon the churches both the freedom and

the responsibility to journey toward common proclamation of the Word, confession of the one faith, celebration of one eucharist, and full sharing in one ministry. There are some who do not observe the rite of baptism in water but share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ.⁸

9. Our common belonging to Christ through baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit enables and calls churches to walk together, even when they are in disagreement. We affirm that there is one baptism, just as there is one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of us all (cf. Eph. 4:4-6). In God's grace, baptism manifests the reality that *we belong to one another*, even though some churches are not yet able to recognise others as Church in the full sense of the word. We recall the words of the Toronto Statement, in which the member churches of the WCC affirm that "the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body. They seek, therefore, to enter into living contact with those outside their own ranks who confess the Lordship of Christ".⁹

IV

10. The Church as the creation of God's Word and Spirit is a mystery, sign, and instrument of what God intends for the salvation of the world. The grace of God is expressed in the victory over sin given by Christ, and in the healing and wholeness of the human being. The kingdom of God can be perceived in a *reconciled and reconciling community* called to holiness: a community that strives to overcome the discriminations expressed in sinful social structures, and to work for the healing of divisions in its own life and for healing and unity in the human community. The Church participates in the reconciling ministry of Christ, who emptied himself, when it lives out its mission, affirming and renewing the image of God in all humanity and working alongside all those whose human dignity has been denied by economic, political, and social marginalization.

11. Mission is integral to the life of the church. The Church in its mission expresses its calling to proclaim the Gospel and to offer the living Christ to the whole creation. The churches find themselves living alongside people of other living faiths and ideologies. As an instrument of God, who is sovereign over the whole creation, the Church is called to engage in dialogue and collaboration with them so that its *mission* brings about the good of all creatures and the well-being of the earth. All churches are called to struggle against sin in all its manifestations, within and around them, and to work with others to combat injustice, alleviate human suffering, overcome violence, and ensure fullness of life for all people.

⁸ Cf. "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling", The Canberra Statement, 3.2.

⁹ The Toronto Statement, IV.3

V

12. Throughout its history the World Council of Churches has been a privileged instrument by which churches have been able to listen to one another and speak to one another, engaging issues that challenge the churches and imperil humankind. Churches in the ecumenical movement have also explored divisive questions through multilateral and bilateral dialogues. And yet churches have not always acknowledged their *mutual responsibility* to one another, and have not always recognized the need to give account to one another of their faith, life, and witness, as well as to articulate the factors that keep them apart. Bearing in mind the experience of the life we already share and the achievements of multilateral and bilateral dialogues, it is now time to take concrete steps together.

13. Therefore the Ninth Assembly calls upon the World Council of Churches to continue to facilitate *deep conversations* among various churches. We also invite all of our churches to engage in the hard task of giving a candid account of the relation of their own faith and order to the faith and order of other churches. Each church is asked to articulate the judgments that shape, and even qualify, its relationship to the others. The honest sharing of commonalities, divergences, and differences will help all churches to pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life.

14. Towards the goal of full visible unity the churches are called to address recurrent matters in fresh, more pointed ways. Among the *questions to be addressed* continually by the churches are these:

- a. To what extent can your church discern the faithful expression of the apostolic faith in its own life, prayer, and witness and in that of other churches?
- b. Where does your church perceive fidelity to Christ in the faith and life of other churches?
- c. Does your church recognize a common pattern of Christian initiation, grounded in baptism, in the life of other churches?
- d. Why does your church believe that it is necessary, or permissible, or not possible to share the Lord's Supper with those of other churches?
- e. In what ways is your church able to recognize the ordered ministries of other churches?
- f. To what extent can your church share the spirituality of other churches?
- g. How will your church stand with other churches to contend with problems such as social and political hegemonies, persecution, oppression, poverty, and violence?
- h. To what extent will your church share with other churches in the apostolic mission?
- i. To what extent does your church share with other churches in faith formation and theological education?
- j. How fully can your church share in prayer with other churches?

In addressing these questions, churches will be challenged to recognize areas for renewal in their own lives, and new opportunities to deepen relations with those of other traditions.

VI

15. Our churches *journey together* in conversation and common action, confident that the risen Christ will continue to disclose himself as he did in the breaking of bread at Emmaus, and that he will unveil the deeper meaning of fellowship and communion (Luke 24.13-35). Noting the progress made in the ecumenical movement, we encourage our churches to continue on this arduous yet joyous path, trusting in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose grace transforms our struggles for unity into the fruits of communion.

Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

CHURCH UNITY - CLAIMING A COMMON FUTURE

An Orthodox perspective

Presentation given at the plenary on the Ecclesiology
Statement

Jacob Kurien

*Father Dr Jacob Kurien is vice-principal of the Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala, India and
a member of the Malankara Orthodox Church.*

There is a proverbial statement in the Harare Report: "Any vision which does not inspire new forms of acting remains a distant utopia". The strength, of the ecclesiology statement entitled "Called to be the One Church", is an inspiring vision and a new form of acting for the manifestation of Christian unity.

As an Oriental Orthodox, I am delighted to notice a Trinitarian image of unity and an emphasis on the faith of the early undivided Church as embodied in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. As an Indian Christian living in a multi-religious and dominantly non-Christian background, I see in the text a commitment for inter-religious dialogue as integral to the unity we seek. A theological self-understanding on religious plurality and a common stance against religious extremism and violence are central to our vision of Christian unity.

My reflections and comments on the text are summed up in seven observations especially from an Orthodox, Indian perspective.

I. An anxiety: over the prevailing culture of 'stagnation'

Our text begins with an affirmation on "our commitment on the way towards visible unity". But are the churches, including my own, really serious about this commitment? Are we not living in an age of ecumenical "stagnation"? (For this term 'stagnation' I am indebted to Prof. Nikos Nissiotis, one of the former moderators of the Faith and Order Commission). No doubt, we have been accustomed to a culture of stagnation, with no spectacular unity-concerns for decades. Let me touch on my own context. Despite the theological agreements on almost all

theological issues, the two families of the Orthodox churches still remain divided! Many people, especially youth, have lost hope and confidence in 'official' deliberations for unity. They have been seeking alternate channels of Christian unity. Our text is in fact inviting the Churches to rethink the legitimacy of our self-complacency, we having become immune to ecumenical sensitivity and have delegated unity-concerns to WCC and similar bodies.

2. A hope : for new 'ecumenical spaces' at the national and the local levels

The second paragraph of the text, is very much underscoring the fact that the Church is manifested "in each place" through local eucharistic *koinonia* and the *koinonia* of such Eucharistic communities is the manifestation of unity which is the ideal conciliarity of the early ecumenical councils. Today we, however, experience this *koinonia* and conciliarity in limited horizons only. Such experiences give us the hope for wider 'ecumenical spaces'. It is hoped that the recently suggested ecumenical space, the Global Christian Forum, can provide new levels of conciliarity in national and local situations too where the experience of conciliarity was so far limited.

3. An opportunity: to heal the painful memories of divisive ecclesiastical interventions.

The third paragraph of our text is highlighting the beauty and gift of diversity in church-life. The Orthodox churches in general and the Orthodox Church in India particularly, witness to an underlying unity in the midst of cultural diversities. We in India have been experiencing it in two contexts: that of the same *koinonia* in diverse cultural traditions and that of the same cultural group in diverse ecclesiastical traditions. We can observe here that it is not the cultural diversity that became divisive, but the ecclesiastical interventions. This calls us for measures of healing the painful memories of divisive ecclesiastical interventions from outside and seek ways of returning to the once enjoyed unity.

4. A missing note : on 'holiness'

The text on ecclesiology has substantial elaboration on the oneness, apostolicity and catholicity of the Church (paras 3 to 6). But its comparative silence on "holiness" is conspicuous. Is this symbolic of the growing signs of unholiness becoming legitimized in the churches? Is not this 'missing' a reminder to rethink the churches' pre-occupation with money and power-politics.

5. A threat : of proselytism.

Two paragraphs of the text (paras 8 and 9) seek to underline our common belonging to Christ through baptism. We should thank, the Faith and Order Commission, the JWG and

other study groups for the theological consensus on baptism as a basis for our common belonging to Christ. Our belonging to Christ through 'baptism, will be the basic ground for the mutual accountability. However, it remains a fact that wherever proselytism is practised with or without (re) baptism in inter-Christian belongingness, the quality of the common belonging is seriously threatened.

6. A need : for more appropriate criteria in judging 'social commitment'

Paragraphs 10 and 11 in the text are projecting the mission of the Church as a 'reconciling and reconciled' community. In my Indian context, the mutual reconciliation of the churches has to take place largely in the area of mutual apprehensions on each other's social commitment. Social commitment is often judged by such inadequate criteria as the weight given to the Brahminic Hinduism, solidarity with the Dalits and the approach to the ordination of women etc. The apprehensions on the basis of such criteria have branded certain Churches as "caste-oriented" and affected local initiatives on church-unity. Therefore, the already existing social apprehensions have to be sorted out, and more appropriate criteria need to be evolved.

7. A Challenge : of choices and priorities in the matter of confessional allegiance.

When we finally address the nine (and similar) questions in the unity-text, are we once again driven back to the pre-Uppsala situation of 'comparative ecclesiology'? The reason for this doubt is that the possible answers may again be 'confessionally' conditioned. In the Asian context, especially that of mine, the local initiatives and enthusiasm for visible unity have been controlled by the confessional identities created by a so called 'ecclesiastical neo-colonialism'. Here, the churches have a challenge indeed to make choices and set priorities in favour of local fruits of visible unity, always bearing in mind the words of the Indian philosopher-poet, Rabindranath Tagore: "emancipation from the soil is no freedom for the tree".

God, in your grace, transform not only the world, but also the churches – Amen.

CHURCH UNITY : CLAIMING A COMMON FUTURE

Called to be the One Church the future of ecumenism
a Protestant voice

Isabel Apawo Phiri

Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri is the current head and professor of African theology at the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu Natal. She is general coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

In this presentation I attempt to present only “one” perspective of the Protestant voice as a response to the text “Called to be the One Church” as an impulse for the churches’ search for visible unity in faith, life, witness and action. This perspective is shaped by my own context as a Malawian Presbyterian, living in South Africa. In addition, it is informed by my work in theological education in ecumenical and multi-faith environments and my commitment to social justice issues through the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

Unity a divine gift and calling

“Is the Holy Spirit present in these ecumenical gatherings that you attend?”

I was recently asked by my minister’s spouse whether the Holy Spirit is present in ecumenical gatherings, as she understood ecumenical gatherings to be simply about what she called “head knowledge.” When reflecting on her question I realized that this is a view that is shared by a significant number of Christians across the denominations in Africa who think that the Holy Spirit is not present in ecumenical gatherings, let alone among ecumenical believers. What is missing in this understanding however is that church unity is indeed both a divine gift and calling. It is the Holy Spirit that guides the church, both at a global and local level, to be obedient to the command of Jesus that all Christians should be one.

As part of a Charismatic Presbyterian Church, my own congregation shows signs of visible church unity by broad acceptance of: a) a variety of different types of baptism; b) the invitation to all believers in Christ from all churches to partake in holy communion; c) ordained ministers of other denominations sharing the pulpit; and d) allowing ministers of other denominations to preside at holy communion.

Koinonia/communion through theological education and formation

The document "called to be the one church" has affirmed that we confess one, holy, catholic and apostolic church". The School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa is an example of an attempt to live out the consequences of this unity through the formation of a cluster of theological institutions who offer theological education and formation to the Roman Catholic Church, The Evangelical Churches, The Lutheran Church, The Moravian Church, The Congregational Church, The Anglican Church and soon the Methodist Church. At a time when many ecumenical institutions are closing in favour of denominational ones, Pietermaritzburg is thriving again as the hub of visible unity of the church as a witness to Christ. The school also engages in multi-faith dialogue and collaboration. This is a clear affirmation and example that ecumenism goes beyond "church unity". This is a very important angle in our witness as one Church because Africa is home to many religions.

The fact that many more churches in South Africa, the African continent and other continents are sending their students to be part of this ecumenical body of Christ is promising for the future of ecumenism in our region and strengthens the urgent need for ecumenical theology to guide the theological institutions and the church in Africa.

Church unity through ecumenical rites of marriage

I come from a family of six children. Despite our Presbyterian background, through inter-church marriages the Assemblies of God Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Church of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church, the Living Waters Church, and the Anglican Church have found their way into our family and we embrace them all. Our family has resisted the assumption that women follow their husband's denomination. Inter-church marriages have been a thorny issue in the body of Christ due to our different church doctrines, especially between among the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches. To some marriage is a civil or social contract, while to others it is a sacrament. However it is what happens at grass-roots level that calls for the Church in Africa to heed the call for ecumenical rites of marriage, as one visible symbol of the obedience of the Church in Africa to Jesus' call for one church. Ecumenical marriages should be a place to celebrate the spirit of fellowship and Christian unity.

The Church as communion of believers

The document on "called to be one Church" has reminded us that the Church is a communion of believers. In practice, the marginalization of people on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and ability undermines and challenges what we have been given by God.

Several publications of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (which is both an ecumenical and a multi-faith movement) illustrate gender challenges to the unity of the churches. For example, many women express the frustration that gender difference is used “to divide women from men and assign their gifts an inferior value”. This can be seen in the inability to deal with gender-based violence in the church; and in the difficulties which women who are already ordained experience in the church as they carry out their ministry. A continuing source of tension is the fact that some churches ordain women, and others do not.

Conclusion

The topic of church unity is far too broad to have done it justice in this short presentation. Notwithstanding, I have attempted to home in on my own context to frame the discussion. I have highlighted some of the possibilities that exist for further exploration such as the potential for unity which exists in all the Protestant churches in Africa. If indeed we believe that God is calling us to unity we need to show it in action through recognition of ordained ministers (of all races, gender, age, ability and sexual orientation) of other churches at our holy communion table; through ecumenical rites for inter church marriages; embracing the spirituality of others through theological education and formation; and affirming the church as communion of believers by getting rid of all that undermines this belief.

CHURCH UNITY: CLAIMING A COMMON FUTURE

Reflecting together on the text Called to be the One Church

Jorge A. Scampini, OP

Father Jorge Scampini is a Dominican priest and is the moderator of the St Thomas Aquinas University's theological faculty's study centre. He teaches systematic theology at the centre and at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina.

As a Roman Catholic, I approach the text Called to be the One Church in a particular way. The text is an 'invitation' addressed to the member churches of the World Council of Churches, which is not the situation of the Roman Catholic Church, although it has entered into a considerable network of working relationships with the WCC in the course of the forty years of existence of the Joint Working Group, and through participation in the Commissions on Faith and Order and World Mission and Evangelism. Despite the peculiarity of this relationship, all that is affirmed and achieved within the WCC takes place within the one ecumenical movement, which the Roman Catholic Church acknowledges as a gracious gift from God, and to which it is irrevocably committed. This invitation thus concerns us. Within that framework of reference I now offer the following observations...

Any title is an attempt to express the thrust of a document's contents. Thus the title Called to be the One Church expresses a vision of the Church and, consequently, a way of conceiving the goal of the ecumenical movement. Without forgetting that we are dealing with what "we at this point on our ecumenical journey can say together about some important aspects of the Church", this vision is a yardstick for discernment that should allow the WCC, at the beginning of a new stage in its life, to evaluate what has been achieved, where there has been slowness and uncertainty in the past, and to discern challenges and determine priorities for coming years.

The invitation is being issued at a particular ecumenical time and place, characterized by the grace of God, who "transforms the world", and the churches' response to that gracious gift. Beginning with its identity as an institution, as expressed in its doctrinal basis (section 1), it moves on to an understanding of unity as *koinonia*, as stated by the Canberra Assembly, and appreciated in Roman Catholic circles for its theological rigour. That is done without ignor-

ing what lies ahead concerning the understanding of “the meaning of unity and catholicity, and the significance of baptism” (section 2). In fact, this tension, between what has been achieved ecumenically and issues awaiting clarification, is present as the central themes of the invitation unfold: the Church (sections 3-7), baptism (sections 8-9), and the Church’s service in the world (sections 10-11).

In dealing with the subject of the Church, the invitation begins with a confession of faith, which is a way of saying that everything that follows should be seen in the context of dynamic faithfulness to the gracious gift given us. This is the context of the affirmations concerning the Church. As regards convergence, Catholics could assent to what is stated in the invitation. It is clear that they would do it in full awareness that a mere listing of the elements that, put together as a whole, express the mystery of the Church, can be understood and articulated in different ways, resulting in different ecclesiologies.

Thus, working through the document and by way of example, in addition to the questions in section 14, we could ask ourselves the following questions...

- a) Is it possible for us all to state, baldly, that “the Church as communion of believers is created (only) by the Word of God” (section 4)?
- b) What are we to understand by “Each church is the church catholic and not simply a part of it” (section 6)? Are we referring to each ‘local’ church or to each ‘confessional’ church? And, if each local church, what do we mean by that?
- c) How long will it be possible for us to go on speaking of Christ’s reconciling ministry without clarifying the basis on which certain moral decisions are made?

5. As the Roman Catholic Church understands it, the unity of the Church as a mystery of communion is expressed by a threefold bond: the bond of the faith that is professed (*vinculum symbolicum*); the liturgical and sacramental bond (*vinculum sacramentale*); and the hierarchical and social bond (*vinculum hierarchicum*). While the first two bonds constitute the Church and are its foundation and origin, the third represents its task of witness and guarantees its continuity. For the Roman Catholic Church that is an integral part of its vision of faith. Thus the divergences referred to in the invitation (section 14) are real obstacles lying in the way of achieving visible unity. That explains why the Catholic Church attaches such importance in theological dialogues to the themes relating to sacraments, ministry and the Church.

6. We who are on this journey and trust in the risen Christ look back to the past and live in hope for the future. At the level of the ecumenical memory, it is important to point out that the issues in the invitation - in a condensed form by the nature of the document - are reminiscent of Faith and Order studies: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), *Confessing the One Faith* (1991), *Church and World* (1990), and *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*

(1999); and are also related to studies by the Joint Working Group: *The Church: Local and Universal* (1990), *Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues* (1996) and *Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism* (2004). This recognition of the ground already covered should give rise to a renewed commitment to make these studies more widely known and to study them in depth, with the aim of encouraging the reception of them by the churches. These studies, which are the fruit of long careful theological work, still have a word to say to us on some of the questions that await a response.

These very questions give me the hope that God's gift to us will not be in vain, thanks to the acceptance and willingness of the churches and the WCC...

a) ...of the churches, because the invitation is being addressed to them as the real protagonists on their common journey in response to the grace of God. They should enter into a renewed conversation "about the quality and degree of their fellowship and communion, and about the issues which still divide them" frankly and thoroughly, because God, in love, is calling God's people to discernment and to the fullness of *koinonia*.

b) ...of the WCC, because in service of the cause of unity, it must continue to have the role of 'privileged instrument' (section 12) and that in two ways:

- by stating that one of its priorities is taking up the theological issues arising out of the present invitation and effectively supporting the continuance of the programmes dealing with the differences 'dividing the churches', particularly the Faith and Order studies on ecclesiology, baptism and theological anthropology.

- by adopting as an Assembly the text before you as your own word addressed to the churches. This can be a milestone in the history of the WCC as an institution, taking relations between the member churches on to a new stage, as was the case at New Delhi, Nairobi and Canberra, and thereby being of service to the whole ecumenical movement.

Translated from the Spanish by the WCC language service

CHURCH UNITY: CLAIMING A COMMON FUTURE

New possibilities in the quest for visible unity
A contribution
from the evangelical churches of Latin America

Norberto Saracco

Dr J Norberto Saracco is a Pentecostal pastor and scholar. He is the founder of Argentina's International faculty of Theological Studies.

You belong to the same church as me,
If you stand at the foot of the cross.
If your heart beats in time with to my heart,
Give me your hand. You are my brother, my sister.

For decades the words of that chorus have been sung by millions of evangelicals throughout Latin America. It has been a sort of theme song in meetings and activities at which brothers and sisters of different denominations met. Its ecumenical theology is simple: if you are at the foot of the cross, you belong to the same church as I do; if your heart beats in time with my heart, you are my brother, my sister.

That simple statement reduces centuries of ecumenical discussion to the barest minimum, but it also glosses over our real divisions.

Diversity and plurality, values which are a legacy from our Protestant history, have drifted towards fragmentation and polarization. These have been features of the life of the evangelical churches and, for the Pentecostals, almost a measure of their spirituality!

However, today it is different. In recent years, it has been the evangelical churches, and particularly the Pentecostal churches, that have worked hardest in the quest for the visible unity of the church. The strengthening of the National Alliances and Federations of Churches, the establishment of Pastoral Councils in thousands of cities, and joint mission and evangelism projects are only some examples of this. We know that it is not the same in all places and that there is still much to be done, but it would be wrong not to acknowledge the truth of this.

For the evangelical churches, unity comes out of their faithfulness to the Word of God and out of mission. In the Lausanne Covenant, it is put like this: "We affirm that the visible unity of the church in the truth is the will of God. Evangelism is also an invitation to unity, since unity strengthens our witness, just as disunity is a denial of our gospel of reconciliation."

For evangelical churches, unity is not based on the recognition of a hierarchical authority, nor on dogmas, nor on theological agreements, nor on alliances between institutions. We have to accept that that way of doing ecumenism has gone as far as it can. We know one another better than ever before, we have said to one another all that we have to say, and we understand exhaustively the causes of our divisions. What is the next step to be? The ecumenical agenda must disentangle itself from the past and become open to the ecumenism of the future. In a dynamic and lively church, like the church in Latin America, there is an ecumenism of the People of God, which declares, like the song I mentioned to begin with, that if you and I are at the foot of the cross, then we belong to the same church, so, give me your hand, let us walk together, you are my brother, my sister. I admit that this ecumenical simplicity may be disturbing, but its sole aim is to help an ecumenism that has come to a standstill to break out of its inertia.

Why can we not listen to the millions of Christians who have no understanding of our divisions? In recent decades, we have in fact witnessed the weakening of denominational structures. There has been a globalization of religious experience. The lines of authority, loyalty and spirituality cut across the different denominations. We cannot ignore the dangers in this new situation, but we must also ask, will this not be, perhaps, the breath of the Spirit? Will it not be that God is creating something new without our being aware of it?

We are being asked, how can the evangelical churches relate to the fellowship of churches which belongs to the World Council of Churches?

When the question is asked in that way, the diversity among the evangelical churches and the diversity among the WCC member churches make an answer impossible.

I can, however, suggest some possible ways how they can relate to one another...

1. We need to regard one another honestly with mutual respect and appreciation. In the past, we evangelical churches in Latin America have (in inverted commas) "evangelized" by exposing the weaknesses of the Catholic Church. Today it is different. In the 1970s we were also not able to understand the struggle of our brothers and sisters who, at that time, were risking their lives by being witnesses to Jesus Christ, his justice and his truth. Since then, we have, more than once, publicly and privately, repented of this. Unity becomes, however, difficult when our brothers and sisters treat us as sects, when they regard Pentecostals as a threat, and see in the growth of evangelical churches an advance of the pro-war right. Unity cannot be built on misrepresentation and prejudice.

2. We need to understand that the religious map of the world has changed and that the map of Christianity has also changed. The centre of gravity of the church has moved from the North to the South. The fact that this Assembly is taking place in this city of Porto Alegre is not a coincidence. We, the Christians from this part of the world, therefore have this not-to-be-missed opportunity to make our unity in Christ visible in our day-to-day commitment to mission. Our impoverished peoples, our pillaged lands and our societies in bondage to sin present us with a challenge. An ecumenism of mission is possible in so far as Jesus Christ is proclaimed as saviour and Lord and the gospel presented in its entirety. We believe that the centrality of Jesus Christ points up the difference between the mission of the church and religious compassion. We need to be clear. Latin America needs Jesus Christ and we should come together in mission to declare that truth.

3. We need to accept our diversity as an expression of the grace of God that itself takes many forms. There are different ways of being church and in recent times that diversity has multiplied. It would be a good ecumenical exercise to find out what are the limits to diversity that we are prepared to accept. But we need to accept one another without reservation, without dividing churches into first-class and second-class. It needs to be an acceptance without ecclesiological word-play (communities of faith, ecclesial communities, churches, and so on), which is an attempt to conceal our inability to acknowledge others as part of the one church.

4. Allow me to end with a question. Suppose we were to give the Spirit a chance? We have used oceans of ink and tons of paper in writing about unity. That has not been a waste of time, effort or money. But it has brought us as far as we can go. Is not this the time for a new Pentecost? Only a Spirit-filled church will see racial, sexual, economic and ecclesiastical barriers come down. Only Spirit-filled lives will stop calling "impure" or "unclean" what God has called holy, and stop regarding as sacrosanct what is "unclean".

The unity of the church will be a work of the Spirit, or it will not be at all.

Translated from the Spanish by the WCC language service

DESIRE FOR A COMMON FUTURE

A play written and acted by

Lei Garcia and John Ngige Njoroge

Synopsis: John and Lei, younger theologians, meet in an international gathering of young people. They begin talking about their vision of the ecumenical movement and church unity (what might happen in the next fifty years). Each one will share their vision; then they will discuss the challenge of achieving that vision of unity. They ask: in spite of the challenge - where does our hope lie?

SCENE I

John Good to see you again Lei!

Lei Hey John, how are you? (*John and Lei hug each other*)

Lei It's so good to see many young people here in the assembly!

John Yes! It's amazing. So, how do you feel to be a participant?

Lei Being part of the assembly, I feel grateful to be among those who acknowledge, hope and pray with Christ for the unity of the divided church (John 17:20-21).

John That's great! Isn't it challenging when we look beyond our divisions into the texture of the unity we seek, its quality and significance?

Lei (*nodding*) Sure it is. It calls for a common Christian identity that invites the churches to visible unity as an expression of a common faith, a common vision and a common witness in the world.

John Would a common identity mean anything to the diversified local Christian churches "on the ground", when it comes to their spiritual, economical and political struggles?

Lei I believe it would. Coming from a church in a country with a colonial past, where the majority of our people suffer from the clutches of unjust economic policies and trading - or we can say empire building - I believe that a united church is an instrument by which our churches, which constitute the household of God, seek to live and witness to all peoples that the oikoumene may become the *oikos* of God. Wasn't the WCC created precisely to be an instrument to build the household of God?

- John And it shall take place through our collective and mutual involvement.
- Lei That's right! This could mean that it is in the creation of a better world that we begin to know what it means to be part of the *oikoumene*. The clearest theological statement we can make is our active involvement in the struggles of the people. Therefore for me the heart of ecumenism is being immersed in the world, in order that that churches find their unity.
- John Wonderful reflection. But is it possible to achieve this vision with all the fragmentation and brokenness, both inside and outside our churches?
- Lei Of course, it is possible! Don't you think?
- John (*silently thinking*) Well, yes! I think it is, it's just that...
- Lei Come on John, I know you are more optimistic than I am.
- John Okay, I think... I think that our common faith in the Triune God, God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, goes beyond our current divisions and quests us not to limit unity only to the level of dialogue, but to make unity practical in the reality of daily life.
- Lei Right, it is possible, first and foremost through the grace of God and through our commitment to work collectively for the realization of these visions. And I also think that we can achieve this vision of unity by reordering our relationships, at all levels, into images of wholeness, mutuality and interdependence.
- John Well, the realization of these visions calls us to worship together the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as a community of believers. This witnesses to God's presence and action in the midst of his people, it renews and keeps alive the relationship between God and his people, and it creates harmony and unity among us.
- Lei Do you believe that worship is the focal point of the existing divisions, due to our widely differing liturgical practices?
- John Sure, but in the future let us participate truly in the spirit of worship - without pointing at each other as being liturgically "right" or "wrong", but rather listening and spiritually benefiting from each other's worship.
- Lei And also: we can achieve this vision of a truly united church if we will always remember that Jesus Christ must be the central focus. Any divergence in our understandings of who we are as a church, our styles of worship, or how we express the one faith - these should be peripheral.

John That's a good visualization, Lei! It helps us focus on what is the centre of our faith, and what is on the periphery. But of course we also have to recognize that our search for unity is not simple, that it takes a lot of perseverance, understanding and respect for each other to achieve it.

Lei Thanks!

SCENE 2

(John and Lei move closer to each other)

J & L As the younger members of ecumenical movement,

J & L we offer our VOICES

Lei to speak the truth in love

John to tell the stories of the unknown, outcast, downtrodden, marginalized;

J & L we offer our EARS

Lei to listen to each other with respect

John to intently listen to the wisdom of the elders

J & L we offer our FEET

Lei to tread the path of righteousness and to go to the ends of the earth proclaiming God's redemptive love and justice

John to dance and celebrate for every blessing God has given us

J & L we offer our HANDS

Lei to support and be in solidarity with those who suffer

John to create instruments of peace, not war

J & L we offer our MINDS

Lei to think of innovative and creative approaches to deepen our dialogue and to realize mutual accountability.

John to dream a just world

J & L we offer our HEARTS

Lei to beat the rhythm of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation

John to love God above all and our neighbours as ourselves

(John and Lei link arms)

J & L Finally, we commit ourselves to a common future of Christian life and witness.

We commit ourselves to our continuing journey in *calling one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe* [the WCC Constitution].

We commit ourselves, through God's grace and our collective response, to transform the world.

We are ready.

Together, sisters and brothers let us walk towards that beautiful day full of love, justice, and peace.

Let us do it!

Amen.

GOD IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM OUR CHURCHES

Namsoon Kang

Prof. Dr Namsoon Kang is a feminist theologian from Korea and is vice president of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI). From September 2006 she will serve as associate professor for world Christianity and religions at Brite Divinity School. This paper was written for the theme plenary of the WCC Assembly.

Opening Remarks

Before I start my remarks, I would like to make clear about two things. One is about the word, “transform” and the other is about “churches,” which are the two key component of the theme that is given to me.

First, about the word, “transform.”

Very often, “transform-the-churches” can easily become a catch-phrase or a kind of propaganda when it is used by those in the church politics. So I would like to make clear what I mean by “transform.” My use of the word, “transform” is based on three sensitivities: “contextual sensitivity, ecumenical sensitivity, and sensitivity to all forms of justice. And this notion of “transform” requires a radical and fundamental change of the very framework of the churches. The meaning of “transform” is not like “reform”. Transform means a fundamental paradigm shift from the old to the new. It requires a thorough scrutinization of the church as it is with these three sensitivities. “Transform” is not just adding something to what it is. It is about a fundamental change of the epistemological framework, institutional structure, practice of Christian tradition, to promote holistic sense of justice, peace, and equality for all living being within the churches and society.

The second point that I would like to be clear about is the obvious simple fact that the “churches” are not a unitary entity. There has been no unitary form of Christian churches in the entire history of Christianity. We tend to have a nostalgic notion of the church, especially in a grand ecumenical gathering like a WCC assembly. We wish to say we are somehow “one” in the name of Jesus the Christ. This is both yes and no – “Jain” in German. In order to reflect on the issue of “transforming our churches”, it is necessary for us to carefully attend not only to our similarities as believers in Jesus Christ, but also to our critical differences among churches. There are churches, for instance, that do not allow women into ordi-

nation, while there are churches that not only ordain women but also have women bishops. There are churches that condemn the sexual minority people in the name of God, while there are other churches that allow sexual minority people even into priestly ordination in the name of God. Therefore, it is obvious that the way we deal with the issue of “transforming our churches” may take a totally different direction depending on which specific churches I refer to. Having in mind this complexity of the theme, “transform the churches,” I would like to start my remarks.

First, transforming the churches requires overcoming a “religious Peter Pan syndrome”.

There are more and more churches that are trapped in the so-called “Peter Pan syndrome.” As you may know, Peter Pan is the one who refuses to become an adult. Simply speaking, being an adult means to grow, to change, to take responsibility. Those who are trapped in the “Peter Pan syndrome” just want to enjoy receiving the tangible, materialized blessing from God but continue to refuse to take any responsibility for making commitment to justice, peace and equality of society. I would like to call this “religious Peter Pan syndrome”.

Growth, both physical and mental, is the only evidence of life and to grow is to change. Transforming the church requires overcoming a “religious Peter Pan syndrome,” changing their perspective of human being, of the world and God, taking responsibility for the world, and continuously being self-critical to become mature. Many Christians in “good faith” continue to remain at the stage of “Peter Pan” by not asking why it is what it is, by not taking responsibility in church and society and thereby continuing to support the system of various form of injustice and discrimination, wittingly or unwittingly.

Many churches are taking out the question-marks from the teaching of Christian life. And those who ask a fundamental “WHY” are easily excluded from the faith community, being labelled, “unfaithful,” “unspiritual” or “less-Christian”. However, not asking “why” but saying always “yes and amen” is very dangerous because there is no way for Christians to see their own participation and role in fostering various forms of injustice and violence. This is the lesson from the history of the Holocaust, slavery witch-burning, apartheid... There are so many examples of how so-called “good Christians” can foster such horrible practice against humanity in the name of God by not asking the fundamental WHY. Christian’s conscious or unconscious complicity in injustice must be revealed by a fundamental question-mark, WHY. But if taking out this fundamental question mark, WHY, the absence of question marks in the churches, may easily lead to the unwitting complicity in the maintenance and perpetuation of injustice, discrimination, exploitation, bigotry, or hate-crime.

“Charity” action of the churches is important but is not enough because it does not ask WHY, because it does not question the fundamental problem of reality that requires the very

action of charity. Charity act of the churches needs to be complied with the compassionate concern for justice. Concerning justice means asking the fundamental question of WHY about the reality as it is.

This question mark of Why is the beginning of transformation of churches. The churches need to move from charity-oriented mission to justice-oriented mission by overcoming the religious Peter Pan syndrome. And this is a way to revive a social accountability of the Christian churches today.

Second, transforming the churches requires “institutional repentance.” Without repentance, no true transformation of the churches is possible.

To grow is to change. Simply speaking, to change is first repudiating prejudice and discrimination. This is what Christians mean by repentance, a complex activity that involves discarding wrong attitudes and publicly espousing right ones. It is certainly easier for individuals to do this than for humanity in its collective forms, but “institutional repentance” for collective or systemic sin can happen and is powerfully effective when it does. There have been several celebrated examples in Christian history.

For instance, in 1972 Pope Paul VI repudiated the ancient Christian accusation that the Jews had killed God, the sin of deicide, and thereby publicly repented for centuries of anti-Semitism in the church. An equally dramatic example of public repentance took place in South Africa in 1990, when the Dutch Reformed Church publicly repented of the sin of racism and the heresy of apartheid and invited Archbishop Desmond Tutu to absolve them.

These acts of “institutional repentance” and repudiation of past sins are profoundly liberating. They reveal the fundamental nature of Christian churches. The Christian community, after centuries of indifference, publicly repented of the great evil of slavery. Thus it was that Christians in the USA publicly repented of the sin that denied African Americans their civil rights. And thus it is that many Christian men today are publicly repenting the sin of sexism in themselves and in the church. They are acknowledging that for centuries the church has discriminated against women, according women a lower status than men, thereby denying the liberating truth of the Gospel. Now it is time for the churches to institutionally repent for the complicity of churches in various forms of injustice and violence, to repent for misogyny, to repent for capitalistic teaching and practice of the Gospel, to repent for religious expansionism and superiority over other faiths, to repent for hierarchical clericalism, to repent for homophobia and bigotry.

Without “institutional repentance”, without knowing what has been wrong in the churches, and without harshly scrutinizing the complicity of Christian churches in fostering injustice and violence of various form, a true transformation of the churches is ever-impossible.

Third, transforming the churches requires transforming theological institutions and ecumenical bodies.

Transforming the churches is inseparably interlinked with the transforming theological institutions and ecumenical bodies. I would call this interlinked nature of transformation of the churches, the triangle of transformation in Christianity. These three areas are so closely interdependent and their own existence is sustained by one another's existence. Without transformation of theological institutions and ecumenical bodies, the transformation of the churches is always incomplete, and also vice versa.

Unlike "reform", "transform" requires a radical, fundamental change of the very ground. If we adopt this "radicality" as the nature of "transform", we need to look at the very ground of theological institutions that educate the pastors and leaders of the churches. We need to first scrutinize the curriculum, the composition of faculty members and also its method of teaching and pedagogy to see whether these are really reflecting the global reality and the pressing issues that we face, whether these are democratic and inclusive enough, whether these are ecumenical enough, whether these are justice-oriented in an unjust world that we live in.

These three bodies— church, theological schools and ecumenical bodies—are like siblings. They are closely interdependent, one way or the other. We must remember that all transforms are interdependent.

Fourth, transforming the churches is also closely interlinked to transforming WCC as an umbrella body of all churches of the world.

Transforming the ecumenical bodies entails national, regional, and global dimension. Since this is a global gathering of ecumenical bodies and Christian churches, I would like to take an example from the WCC for what I mean by transformation based on three sensitivities that I mentioned earlier: contextual sensitivity, ecumenical sensitivity, and sensitivity to all forms of justice .

There have been various discourses on what to transform in the WCC. But there is one dimension that has hardly been challenged in a fundamental way: the very way of communication in the WCC.

An attentive communication with one another is the very starting point for pursuing for the "unity" of the churches. This 9th WCC assembly is drawing a very significant mark on the entire history of WCC in its adoption of a consensus-model decision-making. By adopting this consensus-model in doing its business, the attentive listening to one another, exploration, consultation, questioning and reflection on the issues on the table are becoming more

and more significant. I entirely welcome adopting this consensus-model. Nevertheless, there is one thing that worries me very deeply, which has been a lingering dilemma that I have had for a long time: the standardization of official language in the WCC assembly and other international gatherings.

There is long-standing and deep-seated “rankism” in the WCC. When you are on board, you realize that there are different classes among those who are on board: the first class passengers, the prestigious (business) class passengers, and the economy class passengers. On the plane, those ranks are made by the amount of money they pay for the airfare.

I sense the exactly same mechanism has been operating in the WCC meetings and assembly. But in this WCC gatherings, ranks are made not by money but by the language. The first class passengers are those who speak English as their native language. The business class passengers are those whose native language belongs to either one of the three translated languages: French, German, Spanish (sometimes Russian). Needless to say, the economy class passengers are those whose native language belong to neither one of the four languages, and who cannot express themselves with these four “official” WCC languages.

The choice of language is absolutely an issue of power. Language is not just a means of communication. It is about standardization of thinking, worldview, value-system, culture, and even one’s attitude to other people around. The choice of language is about power: power of decision-making, power of knowledge-production, power to express oneself. Language is power to express who one is, power to persuade, it is power to convey one’s values and opinion.

We should ask then a fundamental questions to transform that has hardly been asked: why it is what it is now, how right it is what it is.

If one cannot fully express his/her opinion with these four/five WCC official languages, the decision-making by consensus is in fact the consensus by only those who hold languages. As long as WCC continues to adopt these four languages, the former colonial languages, it would be impossible to avoid to fall into the trap of the imperialistic mentality that WCC is against. It is so obvious that the majority of people in the world do not speak English.

Today I would like to strongly suggest that WCC needs to organize a “language committee” as one of WCC assembly committees. The “language committee” has three roles to play. First, examine the practice of inclusive language in all the documents and continuously theorize the theological, historical, social, spiritual, psychological and political implication of the use of inclusive language. Second, make a suggestion and even create languages/terminologies that enhance the rights and dignity of marginalized people. And finally, persistently find an alternative solution to this huge dilemma of standardization of official languages in the WCC. The WCC’s decision to adopt a consensus-model is not based on the “utilitar-

ian, pragmatic" value. Finding an alternative to these languages issues cannot be based on the pragmatic value. It is based on the value of true unity in its biblical sense.

Closing remarks

It has been emphasized that churches need to be prophetic. One of the significant acts of a prophet is to read the signs of our time. It is hard to deny that there is signs of "moral disengagement" not only in society but also in the churches.

The churches do not seem to care about the global reality of war, violence, dislocation of the people, and furthermore there is a sort of "church-exceptionalism" that employs a religious alibi for violating even a common-sense and moral code of society. We have to learn to recognize this moral disengagement of the churches and scrutinize church-exceptionalism.

"Transforming the church" is a decisive act of totally reconstructing our epistemology (way of knowing things), our value system, our way of practising Gospel, our understanding of mission of the churches. It is a collective act of hope for a new heaven and new earth.

GOD IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM OUR LIVES

Sarah Newland-Martin

Sarah Newland Martin is the general secretary of the Kingston YMCA and the national general secretary of the National Council of YMCAs in Jamaica. She is part of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) in Jamaica. This presentation was written for the theme plenary at the WCC assembly.

'Grace' is that quality in the heart of God that causes him not to deal with us according to our sins or to retaliate against us according to our iniquities. God's grace pours out love, kindness and favour to all who will trust him.

The Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible indicates that 'transform' means "a change radically in inner character, condition or nature". In Romans 12:2 Paul exhorted Christians 'not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.'

In order to experience a transformed life, the following are of great importance.

1. Openness to God

Openness to God allows us to be frank with him and become aware of aspects in our lives we know are wrong, such as: poor decisions, bad habits, behaviour that we are ashamed of, areas we want God to change, but where we may be fearful of his condemnation. If we have received Christ into our hearts, we have been declared his own, forgiven and now under his grace. (But there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus ... Romans 8:1).

2. Accepting the invitation

God offers an open invitation for us to come in truth and humility. James 4:6 says "God is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble." If we refuse to accept his invitation, there is no relationship. When we come to the Lord, he is willing to listen to us sharing our short falls in the areas mentioned and then he will meet us in that need with his grace. God is not demanding that we change ourselves. Instead he asks us to come to him in honesty and faith and cast all our cares on him (1 Peter 5:5-7).

3. Recognition for the change needed

The story in Luke 18:9-14 which speaks of the parable (told by Jesus) of the Pharisee and the tax collector, showed that the tax collector who stood some distance away beating his chest saying “God be merciful to me a sinner” was deeply conscious of his sin and guilt and in true repentance turned from sin to God for forgiveness and mercy. So it is for us, we need to be aware of where we fall short and instead of being defensive, able to say, like the tax collector, “Lord be merciful to me, a sinner.”

We can experience God’s grace and transformation in our lives when we recognize our weaknesses and come to the throne of grace in truth and humility. When we are walking in God’s wisdom, then we will recognize the change needed in our lives.

4. Acceptance of the transformed life

Hebrews 4:13, says “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Romans 5:20 says, “where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more.” We must take God at his word that his grace is there, in order to be able to receive it. There is absolutely one inescapable condition that must be met if grace is to change a person, and that is, God’s grace must be believed. We have to respond to God with an answering trust. And he will act.

Lewis Sperry Chafer who wrote a comprehensive book on grace says “The overwhelming testimony of the word of God is that every aspect of salvation, every blessing of divine grace, in time and eternity is conditioned only on what is believed.”

Personal experience

As a child I grew up in two institutions after being abandoned by my parents. I was born with both legs deformed – which were of no use.

The first institution was one which catered to children who were from destitute families, orphans, abandoned children and a small number of children with disabilities. I fell in the last two categories.

While growing up at these institutions, the late Professor Back spoke with the late Sir John Golding who had me transferred to the University Hospital and performed surgery to remove the legs I could not use. I was sent to another institution. This one had only children with disabilities. There were some 50 other children and 30 adults who were afflicted with polio after the epidemic in 1954 at that time.

I strongly believe that these men were specially identified by God to do his work in my life. Most of the children had a family of one sort or another – I had no one to call family. I felt rejected, alone and unwanted. Many times I was afraid of not being like the other children

who had legs and who were visited by their relatives. Often times I was reminded by them that I had no one. They were mean at times to me. I felt like a 'nobody' and this happened for a long time.

The transformation came when I could walk on peg legs before being allowed to use artificial legs; when I started going to high school and made to feel that indeed I was like anyone else, that I was a child of God, that I should not compare myself with others, that God made me unique with my unique role, with my own personalities, gifts, strengths and weaknesses. The day I walked through the waters of baptism in 1968 was the key point in my life.

I met my mother and father at age 24 and discovered that I had six brothers.

I found then that when I became a Christian, Jesus began to transform me in His image. I was able to forgive my parents for what happened and my thinking became moulded by God's word which is "inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives" (2 Timothy 3:16a). Indeed, knowing God's word is very important because it is the objective means by which I am able to evaluate the world and myself.

A relationship with God is more powerful than anything else in the world and under grace I have more than my own resources. I have God's Holy Spirit enabling me to do his will. I am able to acknowledge my weaknesses and keep bringing it back to God and continue to take personal responsibility for my sins, asking him to asking him to transform my life on a daily basis.

Often times when I reflect on where I was and the various levels of transformation through which I have passed, I am deeply indebted to God for his limitless love in my life. As a result of my transformed life, the lives of many individuals have been positively impacted, in particular the young people.

Biblical characters whose lives were transformed

The following gives a brief account of some of the Biblical Characters whose lives were transformed:

- Saul (the original name of Paul) who was a persecutor of the church became an apostle of Christ and a missionary of the early church (Acts 7:58-9:26; 11-25-13:9).
- David and Bathsheba – Although David was a righteous King, he was subject to sin, just like any other human beings. On one occasion when his army went to battle, David stayed home. This led to his great sin with Bathsheba. While Uriah, the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband was away in battle, David committed adultery with her. David repented and asked for God's forgiveness. His prayer of forgiveness is recorded in Psalm 51.

- Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector of Jericho who had grown rich by over taxing people. When Jesus visited Jericho, Zacchaeus who was 'of short stature' (Luke 19:3) climbed a tree in order to see Jesus. Jesus asked him to come down and visited him as a guest. As a result of the visit of Jesus, Zacchaeus became a follower of the Lord, repented of his sins, and made restitution for his wrongdoing. Jesus showed that He came to call sinners to repentance.

Self-evaluation

In evaluating our lives one can ask the following questions:

- How do I see myself?
- Do I accept God's invitation?
- Are there hindrances to my being transformed?
- Am I ready to be transformed?
- Is my life one of transformation?

Conclusion

When we become followers of Jesus, God begins to transform us in his image. A key part of this transformation is the transformation of the way we think.

However, it must be noted that transformation is not a one shot experience but is likened to the salvation experience which is a process. We must guard against putting ourselves into a box by asking questions such as 'Why me?' 'Can I be changed?' The process of transformation allows us to ask, seek, and surrender our lives.

Transformed lives depict an outward action of what happens inside as a result we should not wait for things to happen but instead we can pray for others such as our children, friends, fellow believers, missionaries and pastors.

One of my favourite books in the Bible is Colossians which provides many steps in to living a transformed life.

In Col. 1:9-11, for example, we are told that the knowledge of God's will, results from praying and remaining in his word and in fellowship with him. It is only this kind of knowledge that will lead to spiritual understanding and transforms our hearts and lives

As we experience nearness, love, righteousness and power through prayer and the Holy Spirit, we are being transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). In this age the transformation is progressive and impartial. When Christ returns, we will see him face to face, and our transformation made complete (1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 22:4).

GRACE FOR GRACE, TESTIMONY OF A PASTOR'S DAUGHTER¹

*Gracia Violeta Ross*²

Gracia Violeta Ross is a human rights activist for people living with HIV and AIDS in Bolivia.

She is vice president of the association +VIDA, Coordinator for Voces VIHvas and National Representative to the International Community of REDBOL+ . She organizes the Integral Mission "Neither do I condemn you..." with people from churches in La Paz- Bolivia which preaches the gospel to people living with HIV and AIDS.

Gracia

My name has a meaning. Gracia in Spanish means Grace. My parents named me Gracia due to their understanding of "God's grace"; that wonderful attribute of God which enabled human beings to be saved. This essay shows how I (Gracia) received the grace of God.

When I was a child, I had many problems at school because my classmates used to make fun of me with my name saying "Gracias Gracia", in Spanish the words "thanks" (gracias) and "grace" (gracia) are different only in the "s".

Every time I had to say my name was Gracia, I had to explain to people about the grace of God and the reason why I had such a different name, I had to declare I was a Christian and I was not ready to do so with every single person I met. Therefore I decided to use my second name: Violeta, which means "violet", the flower. This name was easier to remember and did not cause so many questions.

Nevertheless, the difference between Gracia and Violeta was not only in the name but also in the attitudes and the kind of life Gracia and Violeta had. Within the church I was Gracia,

¹ This article was published with the title "I have AIDS: Testimony of pastor's daughter" In *The Church and the HIV/AIDS Crisis: Providing Leadership and Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, Tetsunao Yamamori, David Dageforde, and Tina Bruner (eds.) (2004). The article in Spanish *How Grace found the real Grace: Not even AIDS could separate from me God's love!*, was published in the Sunday bulletin of the Christian Evangelical Church of free brethren in La Paz in May, 2003.

² Gracia Violeta Ross is an activist for Human Rights of people living with HIV and AIDS in Bolivia. She is Vice President of Association +VIDA (Integral support for people living with HIV), Coordinator for Voces VIHvas (Women and children living with HIV in Bolivia) National Representative to the International Community of REDBOL+ (National Network of Bolivian People living with HIV and AIDS) and Reference Point of REDLA+ (Latin American network of people living with HIV). She is organizing the Integral Mission "Neither do I condemn you..." with people from churches in La Paz- Bolivia which preach gospel to people living with HIV and AIDS in Bolivia.

living a “good” life like “the daughter of a pastor” that I am. Violeta was a rebellious teenager doing her will and ignoring God’s commandments. As Violeta I did all things Gracia was not allowed to do. This situation ended with me having two lives.

Within the church

I was born in a Protestant family. My father is a spiritual leader; both my father and my mother have founded churches in Bolivia. I grew up in the church. For a while, the church was based in my garage while we did not have a place to meet. I used to attend Sunday school, and learnt about Abraham, Joseph and Jesus and also heard about Samson and his mistake involving a woman who did not belong to God’s people.

Without being completely conscious, I developed two kind of lives. Gracia used to attend church every single Sunday making a “performance” for other people, showing that everything was good. Violeta was a different person and I can say, as Violeta I did not belong to God’s family at all. My life was being divided in two attitudes, and none of them was real nor complete. I was playing with God and the flesh at the same time, this game can never have a good end. I was not a real Christian, I was just someone else in the church, using another seat.

Bitterness roots

I do not pretend to justify myself but the abyss between my life and God was growing deeper every time. When I decided to do my will I never thought I could end my days having HIV. I was not aware of the great risk I was in.

This history of rebellion started with my inability to forgive, and the bitterness I let grow up in my heart because I was not able to forgive my older sister when she became the fiancé of the boy I used to like. Since that moment I started to think all Christian people were a fake and decide to have a boyfriend out of the church.

My bitterness made me feel so much the need of being loved, I needed so much to have someone to love in order to show my sister that even though, she was with the boy I liked, I had many others and did not need him.

This career to get more boyfriends than my sister was my death sentence. I was looking for love, for someone to take care of me, someone to understand me, to be loyal, never lie, to support me, to be faithful, to speak the truth ... I was looking for something in a man that only God can give! So I never found it. Men realized I needed love and took advantage of my need. Men can love but they will ask a price for it, they will ask for the body, the integrity, they ask to have the temple of Holy Spirit. They asked for my body and I accepted.

I kept going to church every Sunday but my heart was far from God. I went into university to study anthropology even though my father disagreed with this choice. While at uni-

versity I began to drink alcohol and met friends who used to smoke marijuana and other drugs.

My family suffered a lot during this time, because they were worried about the people I had made friends with, they felt that they were bad influences to me. They could not understand how was I able to make these decisions to go out with these people, because I had been brought up knowing God, and this was not how they had brought me up.

I remember nowadays, with tears in my eyes, how much my mother and father, my sisters and little brother suffered. They tried to rescue me, they locked the doors so that I did not escape, they prayed for long nights when I did not arrive home, they forbid me the access to the telephone so that I would not be able to contact those friends who took me to drink alcohol; finally they begged me to change and to remember God, crying so many times they told me to abandon that life but I become more rebellious each time they tried to talk to me.

I asked them to forgive me and they did, but I can not forget all the pain I caused. I understand now that my parents are the first authority settled by God himself, the rules they have were there in order to protect my life.

My life far from God

I learned I had to remain a virgin until I got married. My parents wanted me to marry someone from the church, but I decided to date boys outside of the church. I also decided that I wanted to play sex with them. I knew about the severe risk of getting pregnant outside of marriage, and I knew what shame this would bring on my father, especially because he was such a prestigious leader within the church. Therefore I had to find information on my own, regarding issues such as avoiding pregnancy. No one in the church spoke to me about sex or sexuality and all the problems that these issues raise.

I never got pregnant but I was unaware of the risk of AIDS, and at that time I did not realize how much of risk I was actually at of contracting HIV. I do not know how long I could have kept living this kind of life. I did not care about anything. I did not care about my parent's suffering or about my family's credibility within the church, I just wanted to do my will.

My chosen life style had bitter consequences. One night I was coming back home from a party. I did not have any money to get a taxi home, because I had spent all my money on the ticket for the party. I went out every Saturday, without my parents permission, they had no idea that I was going out! Honestly I only wanted to dance, and have a good time with my friends, but unfortunately wherever there is music, there is also always alcohol, at least in Latin America. That very night I crept out of my bedroom via the balcony. It was getting really late at the party, it was 2am and I wanted to go home.

I asked my friends to walk me home but they wanted to stay at the party a little while longer. I begged them to walk me home, and because they all wanted to stay, they choose one person to do it. On the way home this 'friend' told me that he wanted to have sex with me but I asked him why he was saying this, and I knew it was because he was drunk, if he had been sober then he would not have asked me that. He was angry because I said 'no' and he left me alone, right there, and I was left to walk home alone, it was only a short walk to my house from there.

My sister used to help me escaping and getting in again, that night she was not home and had had not read the note I left her to open for me at 2:30 am, I decided to go and look for her in a pub she used to attend. I was really drunk and did not realize that two men were following me. They hit me and took me to an alleyway and they both raped me.

I could not believe this was happening to me, I was so close to home. I felt my heart was being destroyed. I was a child of God; I thought that he had a duty to protect me. I told my older sister about what had happened, but I never told my parents, I did not want to see them suffer. I was traumatized for a time. I did not want to have any man near to me. What happened should have taught me a lesson. However, I did not learn from my mistakes.

"My son do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin (...) these man lie in wait for their own blood."³

"You have made my days a mere handbreath..."

"You have made my days a mere handbreath, the span of my years is as nothing before you"⁴

After this experience of sexual assault I thought nothing worst than that could ever happen to me. I was wrong. Even though I had experienced a great pain with this assault I did not change my life-style. I used to think that nothing worst could happen now, so what for would I try to take care? Why? Everything was lost already, I screwed it already.

In March 2000 I went to a little town in my country, I was preparing research for my thesis about the availability of small loans for small enterprises of peasants in Bolivia. I was bitten by a little insect and the bite got infected, I was getting very tired quickly and was having some nosebleeds. My family and I thought I had malaria because this zone is endemic for this illness. I went to a specialized laboratory to take a test to find out if I had contracted malaria or another similar illness, my older sister told them to test for HIV as well.

The other tests were negative, however my HIV test came back positive. I could not believe it; I had not had more sexual experiences than most of my school friends, in fact I had less than them! I was simply a girl from university discovering her sexuality. I never injected

³ Proverbs 1. 15-18. NVI

⁴ Psalm 39.5, NVI

drugs and I was not a sex worker. My first thought was how to tell my parents. What was going to happen to me? When was I going to die? How could I face the people and their prejudices about AIDS? How could I ever tell people from church that I was HIV positive?

I cried a lot and I was sad and depressed for a very long time. Finally one day my sister told me that I had to tell my parents. How could I tell them? We had never talked about sexuality, where was I going to find the strength to tell them "I have AIDS"? The thought of telling them tortured me for many months.

I decided to tell them. I thought that they were going to reject me. I thought that they were going to throw me out of the house. I wrote a letter to them and I sent it with my sister while I was staying at a friend's. I decided that if my parents rejected me, life would not be worth living. When I saw them they were astonished with what I had told them in the letter. I will never forget their tear stained faces, they had one question written all over their faces: why did this happen to our child?

My family did not reject me at all, they received me with open arms, they told me they did not want to know what happened, they just wanted to be with me and support me until the last day. The Bible says:

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him"⁵

I began to understand this proof of love was a reflection of God's love in my family. This love was just one of the gifts God has prepared for me.

"Let the bones you have crushed rejoice..."⁶

In my anguish due to this HIV positive diagnosis, I looked for God again. He gave me freedom from blame and shame, I found peace, forgiveness, hope and eternal life. My heavenly Father consoled me in the worst time of my life, he showed me promises of eternal life and strength to go on:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me"⁷.

The Lord used different brothers and sisters in the faith to bring healthiness and consolation to the pain in my heart. He showed me nothing could take me away from his incomparable love, neither all the evil I had committed, nor the virus, nor the death:

⁵ Psalm 103.13 NVI

⁶ Psalm 51.8b, NVI

⁷ Psalm 23.4, NVI

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height or depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" ⁸

Not even AIDS can separate me from the love of God!

The sacrifice Jesus made in the cross was enough to save me and enough to forgive my sins and those of people living with HIV. So much grace and mercy were difficult to believe! The Lord is faithful to me even though I was unfaithful! He had a mission for my life, even based on my mistakes!

"Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man..."⁹

I reconciled with God, as king Hezekiah did¹⁰, I humbled in God's presence, I repented from my sins, I asked for forgiveness and I gave God what I still had of my broken life. He forgave me, restored me, healed my body, my soul and mi spirit.

I started to study the Bible again. I was not the same person any more, I needed to know what God demanded from me now.

I have met other People Living With HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). The pain for their souls and bodies is terrible: they die alone, abandoned by their own families, without having a light of hope.

I discovered I was privileged among those living with HIV. I have a family who support me, they do not judge or discriminate me. I am healthy, alive and have eternal life. The Lord told me to work as volunteer with these people.

I wanted to find what God said about illnesses like AIDS. I found that the judging role is only for God. I understood I had to put aside my prejudices if I really wanted to work with these people, specially when we are talking about sex workers and gay people.

I also discovered God gave us examples of what to do in such situations. I was impressed by Jesus' attitudes with leprosy people. Meanwhile the whole society and synagogues treated them with discrimination (physical, symbolic and social discrimination), having special rules for them, asking them to use a bell to announce their presence; Jesus touched them, ate¹¹ with them and healed them, both physical and spiritually:

⁸ Romans 8.37-39, NVI

⁹ Mark 1.41b, NVI

¹⁰ 2 Kings 20, NVI

¹¹ "While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper..."
Mark 14.3, NVI

“A man with leprosy came to him and begged, “if you are willing, you can make me clean” Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing”, he said. “Be clean !”¹².

“...he has given us new birth into a living hope...”¹³

I decide it was not important to know how much time would I live. Each day lived would be for God’s glory.

The Lord had a mission of hope for persons living with HIV and AIDS. God has designed a mission based in my mistakes! His mercy and grace cover my broken promises and my failures. He did not reject me but used my experiences to console in order that I console other people suffering.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” (1 Peter 1.3).

God had a living hope for persons living with HIV and AIDS.

Meanwhile most of people despise and judge us, the divine response is plenty of forgiveness and living hope.

Together with other co-workers, I have decided to found a self-help group for PLWHAs. We work as volunteers in prevention, advocacy, assistance for the ill ones, information for families, society, community based organizations and the government. The Lord has blessed our work, we have been chosen as a “successful experience on HIV and AIDS” by the Pan American Health Organization. God used us to bring hope to suffering people.

“The AIDS crisis is the harvest God gave us “¹⁴

Between the plans God had, was the role of being a messenger to the Bolivian evangelical churches.

On September 2002 I was invited to the Conference on Integral Mission and HIV/ AIDS held by the Micah Network in Chiang Mai – Thailand. I have met Leah Mutala in this conference, Leah is an African woman working as volunteer taking care of the orphans left by AIDS epidemic. She taught me God takes the cause of the widow and the orphan, God is a Father to the fatherless¹⁵, these are only some of the consequences the AIDS epidemic

¹² Mark 1.40 and 41, NVI

¹³ 1 Peter 1.3 b, NVI

¹⁴ Leah Mutala, Zimbabwe 2002

¹⁵ Psalm 68.5; 146.9, NVI.

brings for societies. The most important thing Leah taught me was that “the AIDS crisis is the harvest God gave us”.

“Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest”¹⁶.

This is the message I received for evangelical churches:

Let’s open our eyes and see, the harvest is ready.

The AIDS crisis is the harvest God gave us,
we will crop for eternal life.

“I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done”¹⁷

It is not important for me to know how long will I live any more, because I know, that if I die soon or later, I will be with my heavenly Father for the eternity.

The time I shall live in this world,
I will proclaim the wonders God has done
in my life and the way his great love
and mercy reached me having grace in his eyes;
God taught me the meaning of my name in my own flesh.

“This church that I love...”

God had even more beautiful things prepared for me. I am a public speaker on HIV and AIDS, I am leader of the community based organization REDBOL (Bolivian Network of PLWHA). I am on television often and it is not possible to keep the secrecy anymore.

So my family and I decided to tell the church about my HIV status. We were frightened for the possibility of being expelled from the church, specially considering that my father, currently is the pastor of the church. There is a lack of information about HIV in Bolivia and very often we saw attitudes of discrimination. We prayed a lot but I must confess we did not trust God.

We chose one Sunday to tell the church and since the moment I started speaking I could not avoid the tear drops in my eyes. I so repented, for causing that pain, for being a bad testimony for my church, for the shame I brought to my father and my whole family. I had a fight in my soul, sometimes the fear was bigger than my need to confess my sin.

God had prepared a loving church who supported us since the moment they knew about my HIV status. My dear brothers and sisters pray for me every week, asking God that I can be

¹⁶ John 4..35, NVI

¹⁷ Psalm 118.17, NVI

finally healed. They support me during my trips by praying and also in my speeches and my family with words of hope. This church that I love is a gift from God.

Nowadays

My viral load (number of virus in blood) is 15000 copies/ml¹⁸. Currently I do not take any antiretroviral medicine. These medicines are very expensive (USD1500/month) and no one in Bolivia has enough money to pay this kind of money, and still have enough money left over to live. The HIV virus reproduces itself every 37 hours in my body. A medical diagnosis would point that I am a weaker person every day but God supports me; he said to me:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”.

¹⁸ A PLWHA can die with over a million copies/ml

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NVI

GOD, IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM OUR SOCIETIES

Paula Devejian

Paula Devejian of the Armenian Apostolic Church comes from the United States and is currently working for the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia as Internet development director. This presentation was prepared for the plenary on the assembly theme.

Societies today are faced with ever increasing problems. And while tension mounts between people and between nations, complacency and apathy also abound. We become numb to the disasters, and the tragedies, which make it easy to turn a blind eye to the problems of others. Changes in society can be subtle, but over time, result in decreasing moral principles, values and standards as well as ethics.

Prior to departing for this assembly, our delegation met as a group to prepare ourselves for the event. One of the questions asked around the table was, what did our nation, our community and our church expect out of these proceedings? I had to honestly answer to myself, that I didn't think the expectations were much. Not that there was no hope, but that there is an awareness that no one body or organization can resolve the problems of the world.

In today's society, individual responsibility is often overlooked. When we call upon God to transform our societies, we must not forget that he has already granted us the tools to make this possible. He has taught us, through the teachings of his Son Jesus Christ, the rules of life, right from wrong, good from evil. We also know that actions speak louder than words; leading by example does work; and we can make a difference, as long as we choose to do so.

When we speak out against violence, or tyranny, or poverty, we must also ask ourselves, "What do we do or not do in our own daily life to work to overcome these things?" These are hard choices we are faced with, because as humans, we are weak and the temptation to take the easy path is always great.

It is not easy to refuse or deny ourselves the new piece of clothing because it's in fashion or more modern or even looks nicer on us than three we already own. Consumer excess in the Western world is rampant and sadly, sets a standard that others long for and desire. The quest for material wealth and possessions and creature comforts has a snowball effect on society with people constantly wanting and looking for what's next, what's new and what's better.

This makes it easy to overlook the plight of others. We talk about the inequities in the world, but how many of us make a concerted effort in our everyday lives to make a difference, to not be wasteful, to set a true example for others.

God has given us the tools to change our societies, what we need to pray for is the strength, will and fortitude as individuals to use what he has already granted to us, and make it happen. The examples of God transforming the world are constantly around us.

Throughout history, the Armenian Church and nation has been shaped by God's grace of transformation. Noah's Ark landed on Mt. Ararat, in the historical lands of Armenia, and is an example of God's grace giving all of humanity a second chance. Through God's grace, the Armenian nation was one of the lands visited by the Apostles, and through the works of Saints. Thaddeus and Bartholomew, our bishops have been graced by the unbroken chain of Apostolic succession. Through the seeds of Christianity, planted by the apostles, Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity nation in the 4th century through the efforts of our patron saint, St. Gregory the Illuminator who survived insurmountable odds and converted a pagan king only through God's grace. We were forever defined as a nation when our alphabet was created in the 5th century, which allowed our people to worship and learn of God's teachings in their own language. The first sentence translated into Armenian was: "That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight" (Proverbs 1.1). Even with the first written words in Armenian, the Church encouraged her people to accept the tools of God's grace. Wisdom, understanding and insight, all words leading us to a more peaceful coexistence with one another.

Through God's grace we became a national church, preserving our faith and ethnic identity for over 1,700 years, and while we've also suffered many times for our faith, the Armenian people never stopped believing that the power of God's grace could transform the world. Our people suffered the heinous crime of genocide, not only for our faith, but also for our ethnic identity. As a result of the genocide, our people were scattered throughout the world, but our diaspora grew strong and despite adversity we found strength. We lived through 70 years of Soviet atheism and state sanctioned oppression of our church, and even in those days we did not feel deserted by God, as his light was kept alive in the hearts and minds of the people. We have been separated from each other, those living behind the oppressive curtain of communism and those on the outside. But we remained faithful to one another, through the grace of God. Our people relying on Jesus Christ have always looked to the future, to the coming day, to the better tomorrow. And in 1991, we received our independence, and once more he transformed the Armenian lands. In 1991, Artsakh and the historical lands of Armenia were declared independent and through great sacrifice the land was liberated and today our people worship freely. We have been united once again as a nation, under the banner of the Armenian Church and our spiritual and

administrative headquarters, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, and today through God's grace we believe that there are better days ahead, that our economy will improve, and that our people though denied the light of Christ for nearly a decade, will learn again of God's Grace. In my lifetime, I could only dream that I would one day see the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin free from foreign domination, but it was a dream that I never stopped having. And now that dream has come true, and our people are a witness to God's grace and power.

The Armenian nation is an example to the world of how God's grace can transform a society. The Armenian people, given their difficult history of persecutions, invasions and oppression from the moment they accepted Christianity, should long ago have disappeared from the earth. But they have remained steadfast to their faith, and turned adversity into advantage, using the tools God gave them. While we are a small nation, our people have made impact on the societies, wherever they have lived. By living as a nation in dispersion in foreign lands, we have co-existed with people of many faiths and cultures. We exist on every continent of the world. And even in regions where we no longer live, our positive impact on society remains. We have adapted ourselves to our new homes and made peaceful contributions to whatever society we have lived in. We have trusted in God and his divine grace and succeeded in maintaining our national identity while becoming contributing members of society on foreign shores. We have remained steadfast and loyal to the lofty ideal of brotherhood and solidarity, as first stated by St. Augustine and confirmed by our venerable pontiff St. Nerses the Graceful in the 11th century: "Unity in the essentials, liberty in the non-essentials, love in everything".

God's grace is all around us, he has given us the tools to change our societies, we must find the strength and courage to use them. We talk about unity, about speaking and acting with one voice, and one mind, but we as a body are unable to achieve this among ourselves. If we, as a Christian body cannot unite among ourselves, how can we realistically expect the world to? We talk about unity, but do our actions really reflect that wish. Long after the speeches have been made, studies done, papers written, theories analyzed, what becomes of those words? When we leave this venue, leave the view of the public eye, do our actions reflect these same desires and goals that we preach?

We seek for the world to accept each other. But maybe we seek too much. We have learned through our experiences that perhaps what we should start with is tolerance. Accepting another person's view point, lifestyle, even culture is difficult and sometimes even impossible. If we can get people to first tolerate each other, then the acceptance will come later. But it is something that must be worked on every minute of every day.

God created us as individuals, with free will. And this individuality balances the effects of globalization. Our individuality is what makes us strong. Our diversity doesn't have

to be something negative and can be viewed as a positive if we tolerate the differences among us.

Each of us, by the experiences and wisdom that we have received at this conference by attending this assembly, now have the power to return to our churches, communities, neighbourhoods, family and friends, and by example, through our own actions, affect the perceptions and actions of society. We should not look to "the church" by itself, as a separate body aside from ourselves, to solve the problems of the world, because each of us as individuals make up the body of the church. We have the power within our own hands to change society, we must pray for the strength to use them.

Ecumenical Chronicle

Report of the Public Issues Committee

The following report was presented to and received by the Assembly.

Its resolutions were proposed by the Public Issues Committee and approved by the Assembly through consensus.

Dissent expressed by Assembly delegates is recorded as endnotes.

The Public Issues Committee (PIC) was asked to work on draft proposals for five statements and one minute prepared in advance through a series of consultations and reflections and endorsed by the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches in its meeting on 13 February 2006. These were:

Statement on Latin America

Statement on the Responsibility to Protect

Statement on Terrorism, Human Rights and Counter-terrorism

Statement on Reforming the United Nations

Statement on Water for Life

Minute on the Elimination of Nuclear Arms

In addition, the Public Issues Committee received from the assembly participants within the stipulated 24 hours after the announcement of the proposal of the Executive Committee, seven proposals for statements endorsed by at least ten member churches. After careful examination of the proposals in the framework of the existing policy and criteria for public issues actions by the general assembly of the World Council of Churches, the Public Issues Committee proposes:

A Minute on Mutual Respect, Responsibility and Dialogue with People of Other Faiths.

In response to the six other proposals and issues raised, the Public Issues Committee judged the following actions to be more appropriate:

Trafficking of women

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal about the issue of **trafficking of women** and a request to pay special attention to the upcoming World Cup in Football taking place in June 2006 in Germany which will potentially bring tens of thousands of prostitutes, mainly from Central and Eastern European countries, to Germany.

The Public Issues Committee noted that in its meeting from 15 – 22 February 2005 the WCC Central Committee issued a statement on uprooted people “Practising hospitality in an era of new forms of migration”. The statement underlines human trafficking as one new trend in migration that *“involves recruiting and/or transporting people using violence, other forms of coercion, or providing misleading information in order to exploit them economically or sexually (through for example, forced prostitution and bonded labour). Trafficked persons are often in conditions of slavery and are no longer free to move or to decide on their destinies. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking”*. The statement further recommends that churches should *“combat the trafficking of human beings, particularly women and children for sexual exploitation; to work with governments, churches and concerned non-governmental organizations to ensure that the victims of traffickers receive the necessary treatment and respect; and to oppose efforts by governments to use the existence of trafficking as an excuse to restrict further immigration”*.

Follow-up actions on human trafficking have been initiated in the regions and taken up by some member churches. The Public Issues committee recommends that the WCC general secretary and staff work in collaboration with their regional and international contacts to continue to closely monitor the situation, give further support to member churches and take appropriate actions.

Poverty

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal for a statement on **poverty**. Poverty is indeed a major issue in our world and fighting poverty a priority for the World Council of Churches. The WCC gathered at its eighth assembly in Harare strongly stated that the “reality of unequal distribution of power and wealth, of poverty and exclusion challenges the cheap language of our global shared community”. The lack of a strong ethical and moral approach in responding to poverty is sinful in the eyes of God. The Public Issues Committee agrees that the issue of poverty in our world is a challenge that the churches and the wider ecumenical family are called to address in the 21st century. This, however, must be an intentional on-going process.

Considering seriously the implications of poverty on the lives of God’s people, the Public Issues Committee is presenting to the assembly three statements where the issue of poverty is addressed. These statements, carefully written after many consultations and reflections, call upon churches and governments to address the various causes of poverty in our world. The statements on water for life, Latin America and on reforming the United Nations speak firmly and specifically on issues of poverty and how to fight poverty in different contexts.

Incarceration of the Orthodox Archbishop in Skopje, FYROM

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal to **condemn the incarceration of Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje (FYROM)**. The World Council

of Churches has addressed the situation of Archbishop Jovan by sending, on 31 August 2005, a letter to H.E. Branko Crvenkovski, the President of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, expressing deep concern for the imprisonment and reiterating that the WCC considered that inter-church disagreements and disputes should be resolved through discussion and dialogue and that a judicial approach should be used only as a last resort.

The Public Issues Committee recommends that the general secretary and staff continue to closely monitor the situation and take appropriate measures as needed.

Protection of discriminated WCC member churches¹

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal on the **protection of discriminated WCC member churches** making special reference to the Hungarian-speaking minority churches in East-Central Europe.

On the particular situation of these minorities, the Public Issues Committee noted the report of the central committee in February 2005 where the situation of **Vojvodina** in Serbia-Montenegro was taken up as an area of great concern. Several church and government delegations have recently visited the region. The WCC programme executive for Europe visited Serbia-Montenegro in April 2005, meeting the leadership of the minority churches. In addition, the regional secretary and the WCC Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) monitor and follow up the general situation in the region, paying special attention to minority situations in light of the WCC policy to give priority to the respect for human rights for all people, and the unity between the different member churches in the region. Actions are being taken, when appropriate, with government institutions. This is done by listening to and respecting the diverse perspectives of majority and minority churches. The Public Issues Committee recommends that the CCIA and the programme executive for Europe, in consultation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), follow the developments in the region, continuing to listen to all member churches, ensuring that different perspectives are taken into account, and considering further actions as appropriate.

The proposal highlights the issues of persecution, discrimination and oppression of member churches of the WCC also in general terms. The Public Issues Committee affirms that supporting member churches in these situations, acting on behalf of the whole WCC fellowship, is at the core of the mandate of the CCIA, and whenever such situations arise the WCC will act to protect members of the body, taking up the issues in government relations and inter-governmental meetings.

¹ Dissent was registered from the delegation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, objecting to the wording of the paragraph.

Indigenous Peoples and language loss

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal for a minute on **indigenous peoples** and language loss. The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva in February 2005, issued a statement on **Human Rights and Languages of Indigenous Peoples**. In that document, the central committee called on member churches to urge the establishment of a UN International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2006, or a subsequent year, and to appeal to their governments to remove discriminatory laws against indigenous languages, to work towards removing the layers of educational and social pressures arrayed against indigenous languages, and to actively pursue compliance with international conventions and treaties that regard the use of the language of heritage as a basic human right. The Public Issues Committee regards the central committee statement of February 2005, mentioned herein, as important and relevant and requests the churches to consider practical ways in which they can respond to this world-wide crisis, calling attention to the critical issue of language loss and working towards remedies both at the local and international level. The central committee reminds churches and the Christian community of the diversity of spoken languages as a sign of the presence of the fullness of the spirit of God in Acts 2 and the full diversity of languages as an integral part of the vision of worship in the presence of God in Revelation 7:9. These concerns have also been shared with the Programme Guidelines Committee of the assembly.

Peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula

The Public Issues Committee received a proposal for a statement on **reunification of the Korean peninsula**. During the Korean War when the peninsula was divided, the WCC adopted the UN position which laid the entire blame on the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea and resulted in enormous suffering of the Korean people.

The World Council of Churches continued to monitor the developments in the Korean peninsula. In October 1984, the WCC, at the request of the Korean churches, organized a consultation on Peace in North East Asia. Amongst others the consultation spoke of the peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula and its people. This took place in Tozanso, Japan.

Subsequent to the Tozanso meeting there was a series of visits by Korean Christian Federation (KCF) and National Council of Churches-Korea (NCC-K) leaders in Glion, Switzerland. These meetings continued in Kyoto and Macau. The WCC, in co-operation with the churches in Korea, prepared a framework for unification. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s there were visits and exchanges between member churches in Canada, the USA and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, including meetings with separated families.

The WCC continues to monitor developments in the Korean peninsula including the six-party talks. Last year the Korean working group comprised of the NCC-K, the National

Council of Churches in Japan (NCC-J), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the WCC reiterated support for six-party talks and agreed to continue to monitor bilateral relations between North and South. The WCC will continue to support the Korean peoples' efforts for a peaceful reunification according to the 15th of June 2000 joint declaration.

In September 2004 the WCC executive committee meeting in Seoul made a statement on the unification issue but also on human rights and nuclear concerns. The WCC will continue to monitor the developments and take necessary action in co-operation with the member churches in Korea.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly accepts the responses of the Public Issues Committee to the requests for additional statements.

Additional proposals, after deadline

Furthermore, the concern for the WCC to address the grave human rights violations in northern Uganda, as well the destruction of Armenian Christian monuments in Azerbaijan, were brought to the attention of the Public Issues Committee. The Public Issues Committee refers both issues to the general secretary and WCC staff for appropriate action.

Statement on Latin America

1. The WCC Assembly meets for the first time in Latin America and would first like to express its deep thanks to the Latin American Churches for having hosted the Assembly, to the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) for its work in the construction of unity among the Christian Churches and to the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil (CONIC) who generously invited the WCC to hold the Assembly in this country. The present statement reflects issues and concerns received from Latin American Churches.

2. The Assembly theme "God, in your grace, transform the world" recalls the different transformations the region has experienced throughout its history; a history where hope, life and joy prevail through the centuries as characteristics of the region and signs of God's grace; a history of transformations which continue to take place even now. Recent elections in Latin American countries have resulted in the first Indigenous person to be elected as President of Bolivia and the first woman to be elected as President of Chile. These new political signs in the region follow other changes, which need to be interpreted in the context of Latin American history if the presence of God who renews the whole creation (Rev 21: 5) is to be discerned.

Recalling Latin America's history

3. After millennia of different indigenous cultures, with outstanding developments by, for instance, the Inca, Mayan and Tiwanacota civilisations, the "*conquista*" by the Spanish and

Portuguese crowns in the XVI century gave a common recent history to this continent. This history, with a special recognition of the massacres of various indigenous populations and the introduction of slavery by the colonisers, was especially recalled in 1992, during the commemoration of the five hundred years of the colonisation by the Europeans. In the XVIIIth century, wars against the Spanish and Portuguese paved the way to freedom for most Latin American states. Hence, during the first half of the XIXth century, most of the countries achieved independence. However this political independence left different nations still economically dependent.

4. Since the wars of independence, many political leaders have called for the unity of the different Latin American states and in the last two hundred years many attempts to develop a Latin American unity have been made. Today, in the framework of the global political trends, which support regional integration, such unity is vital. Churches in the region have clearly stated that current efforts to build bridges between states should be based not only on economic trade agreements but should also respond to the needs and rights of the people, especially the weak and vulnerable. In this way, the path towards unity may be a sign of the brotherhood and sisterhood to which God calls all human beings.

5. Several voices in the Assembly pointed to the struggle for life and dignity, which has been a constant experience of Latin American people. Throughout history they have faced wars within and between states, confrontations, authoritative regimes and dictatorships, as well as irresponsible policies by governments and multinational corporations which have irreparably damaged their environment. Tribute should be paid to the testimony of thousands of Christians and other people of good will who gave their lives for human rights, dignity and care for the creation. Monsignor Romero from El Salvador, Mauricio López from Argentina, Chico Mendes from Brazil and Yolanda Céron from Colombia, are a few names among thousands, most of them unknown. The blood of these martyrs has helped to fertilise the seeds of God's kingdom, which have borne the fruits of solidarity, life and democracy.

Overcoming poverty and injustice

6. Unjust distribution of wealth, natural resources and opportunities has generated poverty, which dramatically affects the region. According to UN statistics, now as for decades, more than 40% of the population still live in poverty, while 20% live in extreme poverty. This cannot be considered separately from the implementation of structural adjustment programmes developed by the governments as a requisite from the International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The privatisation of state companies brought in short-term relief and economic welfare in a few cases, but in the medium and long-term perspective, many judge that the implementation of these kinds of policies have worsened the situation of the region, with huge economic crises in the late 90s and early

2000s occurring in several countries. Though in the last years, at the macroeconomic level the region seems to have recovered from these crises, poverty continues to be a challenge for governments and societies and a scandal for the churches. Even in those countries where poverty is relatively less, the gap between the rich and the poor is enormous and the distribution of wealth continues to be unjust.

7. The external debt has been a heavy burden for decades. Churches in the region have clearly stated the debt is unjust, illegitimate and immoral because it had been contracted during dictatorships with the complicity of International Financial Institutions and has already been paid. However, the need to continue to pay the service of the debt has prevented the implementation of effective social policies in most of the countries, seriously affecting education, health and work conditions. Furthermore, as a consequence of the economic crises, migration has increased and millions of Latin Americans are now living in other countries in the region, the United States or in Europe, their remittances to family members back home becoming one of the most important incomes in some Latin American countries.

8. This economic situation further increases the exclusion of vulnerable groups such as Indigenous Peoples, African descendants and rural populations. Indigenous Peoples continue to struggle for the recognition of indigenous rights. African descendants in Brazil, as well as in other countries in the region, still carry the consequences of slavery, which has prevented them from fully exercising their rights as they continue to suffer racism, violence and discrimination. In a region where poverty has often been related to issues of land ownership, landless movements in different countries, particularly in Brazil, have been claiming access to land. Churches and the ecumenical movement cannot be deaf to the cries of the poor and excluded in the region. Poverty is unacceptable in a region which is extremely rich in natural resources. The tragedy is that these have often been exploited in a way that has destroyed the environment through, for example, the contamination of rivers in large areas. Indeed the whole planet is threatened through the deforestation of the Amazonian region.

Healing the wounds of violence

9. Violence continues to be a major problem of the region. Some countries continue to face the consequences of political violence. In Colombia, for example, the armed conflict between political actors has largely affected the civil society. Because of this confrontation, thousands, mostly innocent people, have died and more than three million people have been internally displaced. The conflict has gone beyond national borders, having a serious impact on neighbouring countries. Colombian churches have strengthened their work with victims and have clearly asked the government of Colombia and armed groups to look for a negotiated solution of the conflict which could bring peace with justice.

10. Close to the region and to the Latin American Churches concern, Haiti is another country which has experienced extreme violence during the last years and experienced a political crisis, because of internal and external factors. Despite of the presence of a UN stabilisation force, violence continues, especially in Port-au-Prince. The recently held elections, after many postponements, although important in the need to re-establish democracy in the country, have not brought peace. There is still an urgent need for a broad national dialogue and a process of reconciliation to heal the wounds of the country. The international community should strengthen its support to the Haitian people in their struggle against poverty, for the reconstruction of democratic institutions and care for the environment.

11. The dramatic situations in which these countries live cannot be considered in an isolated way. They reflect a larger phenomenon, which affects the whole region. The new dynamics of militarism that have developed in the last years in the region threaten to become even more apparent with the establishment of new US military bases in different countries, such as Ecuador and Paraguay. However, the influence of the United States in the region is not new. For decades the US has influenced decision-making processes in politics, economics and culture, has supported dictatorships and authoritative regimes, and under the concern for hemispheric security the US has trained the Latin American military.

12. A particular focus of the US agenda for the region has been Cuba. A blockade imposed in the sixties by the US government has continued to seriously affect the Cuban population. This blockade, condemned several times by the WCC, has been hardened during the current US administration. Nevertheless, Cuba has managed to develop effective policies regarding health, education and culture. Civil and political rights need to be further improved if the country is to respond to the process of economic transformation which is occurring. Spaces for dialogue between the different sectors of the society and the government are urgently necessary.

13. Urban, domestic, ethnic, gender or youth violence is also experienced in Latin America on a daily basis. Youth gangs ("*maras*") are spreading in most Central American countries. The churches have especially addressed the major problem of the proliferation of small arms. The Decade to Overcome Violence during 2006 will be the opportunity in the region to tackle some of the faces of violence and bring the efforts of the churches together to build a culture of peace.

Struggling for life and dignity

14. The peoples of Latin America have struggled hard to build peace with justice and achieve democratic regimes. Victims and Human Rights organisations, together with churches in many countries, have been at the forefront of this struggle. The Inter-American System should be strengthened to contribute to implement the rule of law and to deal more effectively with Human Rights violations and impunity in several countries.

15. Moreover, in recent years many countries have made significant changes through presidential elections, as an expression of participatory democracy of the peoples. Candidates and parties who have shown more sensitivity to the needs and rights of the peoples have often been elected. New governments have stood up in a stronger way in confronting International Financial Institutions, Trade Agreements and subsidised agriculture in northern countries. Internal policies, more respectful of Human Rights and addressing poverty, hunger and other social needs have been developed. These governments have raised hope in the region and beyond, though the strong limitations they are facing, and the contradictions and corruption which threaten some of them, should not be overlooked.

Churches accompanying the peoples of Latin America

16. Christianity was brought to the region with the colonisers during the XVIth and following centuries and has not been without controversies. Many times the persecution of those who didn't accept the Christian faith caused thousands of casualties. But through their history, the faith experience of the indigenous, African, *mestizo* and European descendants, has developed a Latin American face of Christianity.

17. For a long time, Latin America has been known as the Roman Catholic continent. But the composition of Christianity has changed over the centuries. In the 19th Century, for instance, the Protestant and Anglican Churches came to serve in the continent and the Orthodox Church was established and has contributed to build the social fabric of different communities. In the last decades, Evangelical churches, mainly Pentecostal ones, have been growing systematically and in some countries have become important percentages of the population. Responding to the need to grant equal treatment to all religions, raised by many WCC member churches, improvements have been made in some national legislations to recognise their rights.

18. Ecumenism has made important contributions to the history of Latin America, particularly in recent times. Churches and ecumenical organisations in the region have played a key role in struggling against dictatorial and authoritarian regimes and defending Human Rights all over the region. The WCC, through different programmes, and particularly through its Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America, and together with CLAI, has been closely accompanying and supporting the churches and ecumenical, human rights and victims' organisations in their work to combat impunity, achieve peace agreements after civil wars, strengthen democracy and build up reconciliation.

19. The struggle for human dignity by the churches can be traced back to the fervent defence of the Indigenous Peoples by Christians like Fray Bartolomé de las Casas in the XVIth century. The struggle for human dignity has been a pillar of Latin American theology ever since. This particular consideration for the poor, the marginalized and the excluded

in different societies throughout history has been at the origins of the particular theological approach known as Liberation Theology. Strongly incarnated in the social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, more recently it has expanded its foci towards the economic, ecological, gender and inter-religious dimensions. Therefore, nurtured in this theological methodology rooted in a deep spiritual experience, Latin American Christianity has become deeply involved in defending, caring and celebrating life in its multiple manifestations, recognising God's presence in every life expression and especially in human life. This experience has been a gift of God to the whole Church.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006:

- a) *Adopts* the statement on Latin America.
- b) *Commends* the Latin American churches in their work to overcome poverty and injustice, heal the wounds of violence, struggle for life and dignity, grant equal treatment to all religions in national legislations and *asks* them to further develop their work and reflection on issues such as grace, economy, gender, youth, disability, ethnicity, ecology and violence as part of their contribution to the ecumenical movement and in preparation for CLAI's Assembly in 2007.
- c) *Invites* churches, ecumenical organisations and other civil society groups to have an active participation in the "Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace" which focuses this year on Latin America.
- d) *Appeals* to WCC member churches and staff to emphasise the exchange with Latin American churches and ecumenical organisations and look for new ways of interacting with the churches and peoples of the region.
- e) *Encourages* Latin American peoples to continue in their struggle to build new societies which respect the dignity of the whole creation and pay special attention to the most vulnerable and excluded, including Indigenous Peoples and African descendants, and to share their visions, concerns and lessons learned with peoples of other regions.
- f) *Calls on* Latin American governments to strengthen their work towards a more effective integration of the region to face the challenges of the present world; to look for effective policies to overcome poverty, injustice and the degradation of the environment; to strengthen the rule of law and the respect and promotion of Human Rights and dignity and to continue to look for ways of enhancing democracy in their countries.
- g) *Urges* the international community, the states and International Financial Institutions to recognise the illegitimacy of the external debt that burdens the region as well as to revise the

rationale of free trade agreements in order to effectively respond to the needs of the population and to the concerns expressed recently by the churches in the region regarding the consequences for peasants, workers and communities' rights, the environment and citizen's participation.

Vulnerable populations at risk Statement on the responsibility to protect

Introduction

1. In January 2001, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the document "The protection of endangered populations in situations of armed violence: toward an ecumenical ethical approach". The document, which requested the churches to further study the issue, was also the beginning of a study and consultation process within the WCC, carried out by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). A deeper reflection on ethical and theological aspects of the Responsibility to Protect is not only of concern to the churches. In a meeting in New York City in 1999, UN General Secretary Kofi Annan asked the WCC General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, to contribute to the international debate on "humanitarian intervention" by bringing a theological and ethical perspective on the issue of intervention for humanitarian purposes.

2. The use of force for humanitarian purposes is a controversial issue in most intellectual and political spheres. While some believe that the resort to force must not be avoided when it can alleviate or stop large-scale human rights violations, others can only support intervention by creative, non-violent means. Others again, give a very high priority to territorial integrity and sovereignty. Churches too have necessarily entered this debate and the current dilemma among the WCC's constituencies has prevailed since the very beginnings of the Ecumenical Movement. During the 1948 WCC first Assembly in Amsterdam, the Assembly restated the opposing positions:

"a) There are those who hold that, even though entering a war may be a Christian's duty in particular circumstances, modern warfare, with its mass destruction, can never be an act of justice.

In the absence of impartial supra-national institutions, there are those who hold that military action is the ultimate sanction of the rule of law, and that citizens must be distinctly taught that it is their duty to defend the law by force if necessary.

Others, again, refuse military service of all kinds, convinced that an absolute witness against war and for peace is for them the will of God, and they desire that the Church should speak to the same effect."

3. In history, some churches have been among those legitimising military interventions, leading to disastrous wars. In many cases, the churches have admitted their guilt later on. During the 20th century churches have become more aware of their calling to a ministry of healing and reconciliation, beyond national boundaries. The creation of the WCC can be interpreted as one result of this rediscovery. In the New Testament, Jesus calls us to go beyond loving the neighbour to loving the enemy as well. This is based on the loving character of God, revealed supremely in the death of Jesus Christ for all, absorbing their hostility, and exercising mercy rather than retribution (Rom 5:10; Luke 6:36). The prohibition against killing is at the heart of Christian ethics (Mt 5: 21-22). But the biblical witness also informs us about an anthropology that takes the human capacity to do evil in the light of the fallen nature of humankind (Gen. 4). The challenge for Christians is to pursue peace in the midst of violence.

4. The member churches of the World Council confess together the primacy of non-violence on the grounds of their belief that every human being is created in the image of God and shares the human nature assumed by Jesus Christ in his incarnation. This resonates with the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The WCC has therefore initiated an ecumenical “Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace” parallel to the United Nations “Decade for the Culture of Peace. 2001-2010”. It is in those who are most vulnerable that Christ becomes visible for us (Mt 25: 40). The responsibility to protect the vulnerable reaches far beyond the boundaries of nations and faith-traditions. It is an ecumenical responsibility, conceiving the world as one household of God, who is the creator of all. The churches honour the strong witness of many individuals who have recognised the responsibility to protect those who are weak, poor and vulnerable, through non-violence, sometimes paying with their lives.

From “humanitarian intervention” to the “responsibility to protect”

5. The concept of Responsibility to Protect was developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in its December 2001 report. It shifted the debate from the viewpoint of the interveners to that of the people in need of assistance, thus redefining sovereignty as a duty-bearer status, rather than as an absolute power. This innovative concept focuses on the needs and rights of the civilian population and on the responsibilities of sovereignty, not only on the rights of sovereignty. Hence, the shift from intervention to protection places citizens at the centre of the debate. States can no longer hide behind the pretext of sovereignty to perpetrate human rights violations against their citizens and live in total impunity.

6. The churches are in support of the emerging international norm of the responsibility to protect. This norm holds that national governments clearly bear the primary and sovereign

responsibility to provide for the safety of their people. Indeed, the responsibility to protect and serve the welfare of its people is central to a state's sovereignty. When there is failure to carry out that responsibility, whether by neglect, lack of capacity, or direct assaults on the population, the international community has the duty to assist peoples and states, and in extreme situations, to intervene in the internal affairs of the state in the interests and safety of the people.

Our primary concern: prevention

7. To be faithful to that responsibility to protect people means above all prevention – prevention of the kinds of catastrophic assaults on individuals and communities that the world has witnessed in Burundi, Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other instances and locations of human-made crises. WCC studies showed that although churches have different views on the use of force for human protection purposes, they agree on the essential role of preventive efforts to avoid and, if possible, tackle the crisis before it reaches serious stages. Protection becomes necessary when prevention has failed. Hence, churches emphasise the need to concentrate on prevention. While external intervention – by the use of force or non-violently – may seem unavoidable in some situations, churches should nevertheless be engaged in increasing the capacity of the local people to be able to intervene themselves by strengthening structures of the civil society and modern public-private partnerships, in terms of prevention as well as protection. Churches are called to offer their moral authority for mediation between differently powerful actors.

8. The prevention of catastrophic human insecurity requires attention to the root causes of insecurity as well as to more immediate or direct causes of insecurity. Broadly stated, the long-term agenda is to pursue human security and the transformation of life according to the vision of God's Kingdom. The key elements of human security are economic development (meeting basic needs), universal education, respect for human rights, good governance, political inclusion and power-sharing, fair trade, control over the instruments of violence (small arms in particular), the rule of law through law-biding and accountable security institutions, and promoting confidence in public institutions. On the other hand, the more immediate preventive attention to emerging security crises must include specific measures designed to mitigate immediate insecurities and to instil the reliable hope that national institutions and mechanisms, with the support of an attentive international community, will remain committed to averting a crisis of human insecurity.

9. At the national level, governments should undertake self-monitoring to become aware of emerging threats, establish mechanisms for alerting authorities and agencies to such emerging threats, engage civil society and churches in assessing conditions of human security and insecurity, initiate national dialogues, including dialogue with non-state actors, to acknowl-

edge emerging problems and to engage the people in the search for solutions, and develop national action plans.

10. Prevention requires action to address conditions of insecurity as they emerge, before they precipitate crisis, which in turn requires specific prevention capacities such as early warning or identification of emerging threats or conditions of insecurity, and the political will to act before a crisis occurs. To act before a crisis is present requires a special sensitivity to and understanding of the conditions and needs of people, which in turn requires the active co-operation of civil society, and especially faith communities which are rooted in the daily spiritual and physical realities of people. Faith communities are playing a major role in trust-building and truth finding processes in many contexts of crisis, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, trauma-healing centres, providing safe meeting places for adversarial groups, etc.

Forming the ecumenical mind on the dilemmas of the use of force

11. It is necessary to distinguish prevention from intervention. From the church and ecumenical perspectives, if intervention occurs, it is because prevention has failed. The responsibility to protect is first and foremost about protecting civilians and preventing any harmful human rights crisis. The international community's responsibility is basically a non-military preventive action through such measures as the deployment of humanitarian relief personnel and special envoys, through capacity building and the enhancement of sustainable local infrastructure, and the imposition of economic sanctions and embargoes on arms, etc. The international community has a duty to join the pursuit of human security before situations in troubled states degenerate to catastrophic proportions. This is the duty of protection through prevention of assaults on the safety, rights, and wellbeing of people in their homes and communities and on the wellbeing of the environment in which they live.

12. In calling on the international community to come to the aid of vulnerable people in extraordinary suffering and peril, the fellowship of churches is not prepared to say that it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force for the protection of the vulnerable. This refusal in principle to preclude the use of force is not based on a naïve belief that force can be relied on to solve intractable problems. Rather, it is based on the certain knowledge that the objective must be the welfare of people, especially those in situations of extreme vulnerability and who are utterly abandoned to the whims and prerogatives of their tormentors. It is a tragic reality that civilians, especially women and children, are the primary victims in situations of extreme insecurity and war.

13. The resort to force is first and foremost the result of the failure to prevent what could have been prevented with appropriate foresight and actions, but having failed, and having

acknowledged such failure, the world needs to do what it can to limit the burden and peril that is experienced by people as a consequence. This force can be legitimised only to stop the use of armed force in order to reinstate civil means, strictly respecting the proportionality of means. It needs to be controlled by international law ² in accordance to the UN Charter and can only be taken into consideration by those who themselves follow international law strictly. This is an imperative condition. The breach of law cannot be accepted even when this, at times, seems to lead – under military aspects – to a disadvantage or to hamper the efficiency of the intervention in the short term. Just as individuals and communities in stable and affluent societies are able in emergencies to call on armed police to come to their aid when they experience unusual or extraordinary threats of violence, churches recognise that people in much more perilous circumstances should have the right to call for and have access to protection.

14. Churches may acknowledge that the resort to force for protection purposes in 'some circumstances will be an option that cannot guarantee success but that must be tried because the world has failed to find, and continues to be at a loss to find, any other means of coming to the aid of those in desperate situations. It should be noted that some within the churches refuse the use of force in all circumstances. Their form of responsibility is to persist in preventative engagement and, whatever the cost – as a last resort – to risk non-violent intervention during the use of force. Either of these approaches may fail too, but they both need to be respected as expressions of Christian responsibility.

The limits of the use of force

15. The churches do not, however, believe in the exercise of lethal force to bring in a new order of peace and safety. By limiting the resort to force quite specifically to immediate protection objectives, the churches insist that the kinds of long-term solutions that are required – that is, the restoration of societies to conditions in which people are for the most part physically safe, in which basic economic, social, and health needs are met, where fundamental rights and freedoms are respected, where the instruments of violence are controlled, and in which the dignity and worth of all people are affirmed – cannot be delivered by force. Indeed, the limiting of legitimate force to protection operations is the recognition that the distresses of deeply troubled societies cannot be quickly alleviated by either military means or diplomacy; and that in the long and painstakingly slow process of rebuilding the conditions for sustainable peace, those that are most vulnerable are entitled to protection from at least the most egregious of threats.

² Dissent was registered from John Alfred Steele, delegate from the Anglican Church of Canada, who believes that the strict application of international law should not prevent intervention in extreme situations such as genocide or ongoing widespread killing of civilian populations.

16. The use of force for humanitarian purposes can never be an attempt to find military solutions to social and political problems, to militarily engineer new social and political realities. Rather, it is intended to mitigate imminent threats and to alleviate immediate suffering while long-term solutions are sought by other means. The use of force for humanitarian purposes must therefore be carried out in the context of a broad spectrum of economic, social, political, and diplomatic efforts to address the direct and long-term conditions that underlie the crisis. In the long run, international police forces should be educated and trained for this particular task, bound to international law. Interventions should be accompanied by strictly separate humanitarian relief efforts and should include the resources and the will to stay with people in peril until essential order and public safety are restored and there is a demonstrated local capacity to continue to build conditions of durable peace.

17. The force that is to be deployed and used for humanitarian purposes must also be distinguished from military war-fighting methods and objectives. The military operation is not a war to defeat a state but an operation to protect populations in peril from being harassed, persecuted or killed. It is more related to just policing – though not necessarily in the level of force required – in the sense that the armed forces are not employed in order to “win” a conflict or defeat a regime. They are there only to protect people in peril and to maintain some level of public safety while other authorities and institutions pursue solutions to underlying problems.

18. It is the case, therefore, that there may be circumstances in which affected churches actively call for protective intervention for humanitarian purposes. These calls will always aim at the international community and pre-suppose a discerning and decision-making process in compliance with the international community, strictly bound to international law. These are likely to be reluctant calls, because churches, like other institutions and individuals, will always know that the current situation of peril could have been, and should have been, avoided. The churches in such circumstances should find it appropriate to recognise their own collective culpability in failing to prevent the crises that have put people in such peril.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006:

a) *Adopts* the statement on the Responsibility to Protect and expresses thanks to all member churches and individuals involved in the study and consultation process on “The Responsibility to Protect: Ethical and Theological Reflection” and asks the Central Committee to consider further developing guidelines for the member churches, based on the principles in this report.

b) *Fosters* prevention as the key tool and concern of the churches, in relation to the Responsibility to Protect. Because churches and other faith communities and their leader-

ship are rooted in the daily spiritual and physical realities of people, they have both a special responsibility and opportunity to participate in the development of national and multi-lateral protection and war prevention systems. Churches and other faith communities have a particular responsibility to contribute to the early detection of conditions of insecurity, including economic, social and political exclusion. Prevention is the only reliable means of protection, and early detection of a deteriorating security situation requires the constant attention of those who work most closely with, and have the trust of, affected populations.

c) Joins with other Christians around the world in repenting for our collective failure to live justly and to promote justice. Such a stance in the world is empowered by acknowledging that the Lordship of Christ is higher than any other loyalty and by the work of the Holy Spirit. Critical solidarity with the victims of violence and advocacy against all the oppressive forces must also inform our theological endeavours towards being a more faithful church. The church's ministry with, and accompaniment of, people in need of protection is grounded in a holistic sojourning with humanity throughout all of life, in good times and in bad.

d) Reaffirms the churches' ministry of reconciliation and healing as an important role in advancing national and political dialogue to unity and trust. A unifying vision of a state is one in which all parts of the population feel they have a stake in the future of the country. Churches should make a particular point of emphasising the understanding of sovereignty as responsibility. Under the sovereignty of God we understand it to be the duty of humanity to care for one another and all of creation. The sovereignty exercised by human institutions rests on the exercise of the Responsibility to Protect one another and all of creation.

e) Calls upon the international community and the individual national governments to strengthen their capability in preventive strategies, and violence-reducing intervention skills together with institutions of the civil society, to contribute to and develop further the international law, based on human rights, and to support the development of policing strategies that can address gross human rights violations.

f) Urges the United Nations Security Council, in situations where prevention has failed and where national governments cannot or will not provide the protection to which people are entitled, to take timely and effective action, in cooperation with regional organisations as appropriate, to protect civilians in extreme peril and foster emergency responses designed to restore sustainable safety and well-being with rigorous respect for the rights, integrity and dignity of the local populations.

g) Further calls upon the international community and individual national governments to invest much greater resources and training for non-violent intervention and accompaniment of vulnerable peoples.

h) Asks the Central Committee to consider a study process engaging all member churches and ecumenical organisations in order to develop an extensive ecumenical declaration on

peace, firmly rooted in an articulated theology. This should deal with topics such as just peace, the Responsibility to Protect, the role and the legal status of non-state combatants, the conflict of values (for example: territorial integrity and human life). It should be adopted at the conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence in 2010.

Statement on terrorism, counter-terrorism and human rights

1. "The violence of terrorism – in all its many forms – is abhorrent to all who believe human life is a gift of God and therefore infinitely precious. Every attempt to intimidate others by inflicting indiscriminate death and injury upon them is to be universally condemned. The answer to terrorism, however, cannot be to respond in kind, for this can lead to more violence and more terror. Instead, a concerted effort of all nations is needed to remove any possible justification for such acts."
2. This message, included in the letter of the General Secretary of the WCC to the Secretary General of the United Nations on October 1, 2001 is reaffirmed by the 9th Assembly of the WCC.
3. In recent times, acts of terror and some aspects of the so-called "war on terror" have introduced new dimensions of violence. In addition, fundamental international laws and norms, including long-established standards of human rights, have come under threat.
4. Terrorists base their actions in absolutist claims. Religion is sometimes used as a pretext for the use of violence as being divinely sanctioned. Assembled as representatives from churches in all corners of the world, we state unequivocally that terror, as indiscriminate acts of violence against unarmed civilians for political or religious aims, can never be justified legally, theologically or ethically.
5. The WCC's 9th Assembly supports the stated goal of the Decade to Overcome Violence to "relinquish any theological justification for violence and to affirm a new spirituality of reconciliation and active non-violence".
6. Acts of terror are criminal acts, and should be addressed by the use of the instruments of the rule of law, both nationally and internationally. These instruments should be strengthened. The internationally accepted norms and standards of human rights and humanitarian law are the result of common efforts and are specifically meant to deal with situations of crisis and threats to individuals and societies. There is a danger that these instruments will be eroded in the response to terror. It is of critical importance to resist this erosion of rights and liberties. The "war on terror" has redefined war and relativised international law and human rights norms and standards. A military response to terror may become indiscriminately destructive and cause fear in affected populations. It may provide legitimacy to a violent approach rather than the criminal justice approach which is appropriate in dealing with

cases of terror. The international community should co-operate in addressing terrorism, especially by strengthening the International Criminal Court to respond to acts of terror. Terror can only be overcome by the international community that upholds respect for the dignity of human beings and the rule of law.

7. Churches and all other faith communities are called to respond to the reality of living in a world terrorised by fear. At such a time it is appropriate to point to the rich resources in religion which can guide us to peace and reconciliation. These resources should be utilised when religious communities and religious leaders come together to speak out against all acts of terror and any attempt to legitimise it. They should also take action against any attempt at meeting terror with military means and disrespect for human rights and the rule of law. Religious communities and leaders should be in the forefront of the struggle for a society which is ruled by law and respect for human dignity. Churches have a pivotal role in framing the issues within a culture of dialogue.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006:

Adopts the Statement on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights.

Affirms the role of the churches to seek peace and pursue it. Violence against unarmed and innocent civilians for political or religious aims by states and non-state actors can never be justified legally, theologically or ethically.

Requests UN member states with urgency to agree on a clear definition of Terrorism. .

Urges that terrorist acts and threats as well as organisational support for terror be considered as matters of criminal justice. Measures to counter terrorism must be demilitarised and the concept of "war on terror" must be firmly and resolutely challenged by the churches.

Appreciates the theological work done by the churches on the concept of security and calls for its further development.

Expresses the need to accompany and support the churches as they respond prophetically and creatively in a pastoral and prophetic mission to assist those that are caught up in fear.

Encourages interfaith initiatives to mobilise alternate responses to terrorism that do not rely on violence. They should reject all attempts to justify acts of terror as a response to political and social problems and play an active role in the prevention of conflicts by serving as an early warning system and by building a culture of peace for life.

Affirms that all acts to counter terrorism by the state must remain within the framework of the international rule of law ensuring respect for human rights and humanitarian law. Legislation to counter terrorism should not result in humiliation and violation of the human

rights and dignities. It is necessary for the states and the international community to go beyond policing and military co-operation and embrace co-operation in order to address root causes of terrorism.

Statement on UN reform

1. On many previous occasions the governing bodies of the World Council of Churches have affirmed the unique role of the United Nations and the noble ideals embodied in its Charter. The sixtieth anniversary of the UN and the process of reform initiated before the recent summit meeting offer an occasion for this assembly of the World Council to consider the present state of the international order and to call on member churches to renew and strengthen their active support for and engagement with the UN at a critical moment in its history. The churches, together with the wider civil society, carry a responsibility to shape the public opinion and to generate the political will for multilateral co-operative action that is needed for the UN to succeed in its mission.

2. Many of the “peoples of the United Nations” continue to cry for justice and peace. We hear this cry especially from peoples living under occupation and oppressive regimes, from victims of war and civil conflict, from the millions of uprooted people, from Indigenous Peoples displaced from ancestral land and from those suffering from the HIV and other pandemics, hunger, the lack of work, clean water and access to land for cultivation. Many have become disappointed in view of the limitations of the capacity of the UN to address their cries. Through droughts, floods, hurricanes and severe climate changes we also hear the cry of the earth that is groaning under the impact of human greed and brutal exploitation of the resources of nature.

3. As Christians we live by the promise and the hope that God hears the cries of the people and will deliver them from their sufferings. When we pray: “God, in your grace, transform the world” we trust that God, through God’s life-giving Spirit, continues to offer life in its fullness. As we pray, we must be prepared to act in order to become co-workers with God in transforming ourselves, our communities and the international order and build a culture of life in dignity in just and sustainable communities.

4. When the UN was founded in 1945 it was guided by the vision: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to affirm faith in fundamental human rights, to establish the basic conditions for justice and the rule of law, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. People of faith inspired this vision and it has been the basis for the strong support that the WCC has rendered to the work and the aspirations of the UN and to the principle of multilateralism throughout its 60 years history.

5. After the end of the Cold War and the rapid spread of globalisation the UN finds itself at a critical juncture. On the one hand, complex global problems require a co-operative and

multilateral response. Never before has it been so clear that the challenges of communicable diseases and environmental degradation, of corruption and organised crime, of proliferation of arms and the threat of terrorism cannot be resolved by individual states alone. On the other hand, this very situation has given rise to new fears, to mutual suspicion, and even to acts of indiscriminate violence leading some to withdraw behind barriers of exclusion or to rush to unilateral action believing that it is more effective.

6. The UN is based on the commitment of governments to act together and in solidarity with one another. In spite of weaknesses of the UN and failures of governments to cooperate through its forum it is still the best instrument that we have to respond to the contemporary challenges. In its 60-year history the UN and its specialised agencies have been able to strengthen the international rule of law, resolve many conflicts (e.g. in Kampuchea, East Timor, Namibia, and Liberia), resettle millions of refugees, raise the level of literacy, support education for all, introduce basic health care, fight poverty and respond to countless emergencies as well as natural and man-made disasters. The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the commitments for financing development and the recent agreements regarding the cancellation of unpayable and illegitimate debt are indications that this commitment for multilateral action is still alive.

7. The changed global situation, however, obliges the UN and member states to engage in a serious process of reform in order to retain the capacity to respond to the basic mandate of the UN and to the aspirations of the people of the world. The reform process must continue to go beyond the framework of the UN organisation and aim at improving global governance based on the principle of multilateralism.

8. One significant achievement of the summit was the acknowledgement that the realisation of peace/security, development/social and economic justice and the implementation of human rights are inseparably linked. This should serve as the fundamental framework and policy orientation for the continuing process of reform. In fact, for people on the ground it has always been obvious that there can be no security in a situation of utter deprivation; that economic development at the expense of the recognition of human rights, in particular the rights of the marginalized, women, children, indigenous and differently-abled people does not serve the cause of social justice; and that without basic human security and the satisfaction of human needs the affirmation of human rights loses its meaning.

9. This acknowledgement of the linkage of the three pillars has implications for the ways we conceive of and approach action in the fields of security, development and human rights. We reaffirm the statement by the WCC assembly at Vancouver (1983): "No nation can pretend to be secure so long as others' legitimate rights to sovereignty and security are neglected or denied. Security can therefore be achieved only as a common enterprise of nations but secu-

rity is also inseparable from justice. A concept of 'common security' of nations must be reinforced by a concept of 'people's security'. True security for the people demands respect for human rights, including the right to self-determination, as well as social and economic justice for all within every nation, and a political framework that would ensure it" (Gathered for Life, 134). This position was also emphasised again with the previous assembly at Harare (1998) in the statements on human rights and globalisation. "Human rights are the essential basis for a just and durable peace. Failure to respect them often leads to conflict and warfare... There is an urgent need to learn the lessons from the past, and to set up mechanisms of early intervention when danger signals appear" (Together on the Way, 200ff).

10. The fact that the outcome document of the 2005 UN World Summit recognises the inseparable linkage of the three pillars of security, development and human rights speaks for determined efforts to strengthen organisational and policy coherence in the UN system across borders and between specialised institutions, interests and constituencies.

11. Compared to expectations raised and perceived needs, the outcome of the UN World Summit in September 2005 was disappointing. Although, in the field of security, important achievements were made with the endorsement of the principle "The Responsibility to Protect" as a normative obligation and the commitment to a more coherent approach to conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding through the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, there was no agreement on disarmament and non-proliferation. On terrorism, the summit was not able to agree on a clear international definition making attacks against civilians for political purposes once and for all indefensible, nor to go beyond intelligence, policing and military co-operation to embrace in co-operation to addressing root causes. The highly politicised proposal for reform and reconstruction of the Security Council also ended in a deadlock.

12. Although, on development, the outcome document of the summit reinforced commitments towards the Millennium Development Goals and goals of full employment and decent work, no new commitments in aid, debt relief or trade were made. In failing to do so the world leaders failed to acknowledge the urgency of action on this area. The WCC was the first organisation to propose a target for official development assistance, of two per cent of national income. It is vital that member churches in donor countries continue to be strong advocates to their governments and the public of sustaining or increasing aid to the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP without harmful economic conditions. Combined with more just trade policies and faster and deeper reduction of official debt, it is possible to sustain development and poverty reduction to fulfil the MDGs, and even move beyond these important limited goals.

13. The agreement to double the resources and approve a new action plan for the High Commissioner on Human Rights is an important step. The new Human Rights Council, if

given a prominent role in the UN structure and with appropriate tools, offers a potential to improve the Human Rights Mechanisms. While the Commission on Human Rights played an outstanding role in generating core standards on human rights, it has largely failed in achieving implementation, a failure compounded by the current context of the “War on terror”, which has seriously undermined the rule of law internationally and in particular the respect for human rights law. The reluctance by some countries to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is another example of undermining progress of the international rule of law.

14. Non-governmental organisations play an important role at the UN providing crucial information, monitoring decision-making processes, creating opportunities for the voices from the grassroots, often the victims of international policies, to be heard and to overcome attitudes of narrow self-interest and promote the spirit of multilateralism. Churches are called to continue and strengthen their efforts to play a part in this vital role of engaging with the UN and holding it and member states to account for their decisions and policies. The unique role that religions or religious organisations could play in addressing conflict, and working for peace, human rights and ending poverty is not yet fully realised. There is an urgent need for the UN and member states to strengthen the capacity to deal with the growing interaction between religion and politics. There is also an urgent need for the churches and the WCC to strengthen their own capacities to continue and improve their engagements with the UN.

15. The real test for any steps in this reform process will be whether it increases the chances for life in dignity and sustainable communities for the people on the ground. This is the privileged context for the work and witness of the churches. They are entrusted with a message of life and hope that can dispel suspicion and paralysing fears and set people free to gain courage and confidence in their capacity to transform their lives in community.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006:

a) *Adopts* the statement on UN Reform, to advance the objective of a more effective United Nations dedicated to the pursuit of global peace with justice.

b) *Reaffirms* the dedication of the World Council of Churches and member churches to the principles and purposes of the UN, its charter, and its role in advancing the rule of law and in elaborating norms and standards of state behaviour that serve the safety and wellbeing of all people. The effectiveness of the UN depends on accountable and inclusive democratic decision-making that does not sideline small, less powerful, and economically deprived members, and the success of UN reform is judged in terms of the capacity of the UN to

change the situation of the people on the ground and make a practical positive difference and an improvement to their comprehensive wellbeing. Reaffirms furthermore the dedication of the WCC to be present and visible at the UN.

c) *Encourages* the churches to urge member states to cooperate actively with the United Nations and to keep faith with their commitments to financing the Organisation and ensuring that the organisation and its agencies are adequately staffed and funded to achieve their mandate.

On security

d) *Supports* changes to the permanent membership of the UN Security Council that would make it more geographically, politically and culturally representative of today's world, and that would encourage working methods and decision-making processes that enable fair, effective, and timely responses to the needs of vulnerable people and to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict. All current and aspiring members of the UN Security Council should fully comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

e) *Welcomes* the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission as a means of developing new and appropriate ways of responding to civil conflict. The Peacebuilding Commission should adopt and endorse peacebuilding principles and practices, which emphasise local ownership in peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes. These should also promote the full participation of women (in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325), the marginalised groups, Indigenous Peoples, differently-abled people and youth. At the same time current disarmament forums and mechanisms must be strengthened and made more effective in advancing the already agreed global objectives of the elimination of nuclear weapons and of controlling conventional arms and arms transfers.

On development

f) *Underlines* the importance of democratically selected, open and accountable forums for discussion of global economic, social and environmental issues and calls for increasing their significance in comparison with exclusive, unbalanced and secretive forums. The UN Economic and Social Council should be enabled to hold finance ministers, meetings on global macro-economic management, to more actively address environmental issues integrated with social and economic issues and to hold the International Financial Institutions to account. Commitments made by governments in financing for development, towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, debt cancellation and for sustainable development should be seen as binding and the UN has to be given instruments to ensure their implementation.

g) *Encourages* churches to work with member states to make the UN an initiator and a global monitor for management of natural resources and public goods and for strengthening the

mechanisms to ensure that transnational corporations are held accountable to global standards.

On human rights

h) *Stresses* that reform of the UN human rights architecture must result in an improvement of the capacity of the UN to engage with and make a practical positive difference in the lives of victims of injustice, discrimination and oppression around the world. The system of Special Procedures developed by the Commission on Human Rights, of the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies as well as of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her office should be actively supported, and their independence respected and their capacity substantially enhanced.

i) *Urges* member states to avoid politicising the composition of the new Human Rights Council and give it a status within the UN architecture that reflects the central importance of human rights as one of the three pillars of the UN system. Members of the UN Human Rights Council must demonstrate through their policies, actions and domestic and international human rights record a genuine commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, including the economic, social and cultural rights. Being a UN member state or even a permanent member of the UN Security Council does not by itself meet this criterion ³.

On civil society participation

j) *Asks* all states to ensure the ongoing participation of civil society organisations and faith communities in the work of the UN, at local and international levels, as a means of encouraging transparency and accountability as well as a means of availing itself of essential expertise and information. This should be particularly emphasised with respect to the role of religions and religious organisations in addressing issues of security, human rights, development and the growing interplay between religion and politics.

Statement on water for life

1. Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to

³ Dissent was registered from the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the right of UN member states to participate in the Human Rights Council regardless of their political or ideological systems.

speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.

2. Access to freshwater supplies is becoming an urgent matter across the planet. The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation. Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations. Biodiversity is also threatened by the depletion and pollution of fresh water resources or through impacts of large dams, large scale mining and hot cultures (irrigation) whose construction often involves the forced displacement of people and disruption of the ecosystem. The integrity and balance of the ecosystem is crucial for the access to water. Forests build an indispensable part in the ecosystem of water and must be protected. The crisis is aggravated by climate change and further deepened by strong economic interests. Water is increasingly treated as a commercial good, subject to market conditions.

3. Scarcity of water is also a growing source of conflict. Agreements concerning international watercourses and river basins need to be more concrete, setting out measures to enforce treaties made and incorporating detailed conflict resolution mechanisms in case disputes erupt.

4. Both locally and internationally there are positive and creative responses to raise the profile of Christian witness to water issues.

5. Churches in Brazil and in Switzerland, for instance, have made a Joint Ecumenical Declaration on Water as a Human Right and a Common Public Good – by itself an excellent example for ecumenical co-operation. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew states that water can never be regarded or treated as private property or become the means and end of individual interest. He underlines that indifference towards the vitality of water constitutes both a blasphemy to God the Creator and a crime against humanity. Churches in various countries and their specialised ministries have joined together in the Ecumenical Water Network in working for the provision of freshwater and adequate sanitation and advocating for the right to water. Access to water is indeed a basic human right. The United Nations has called for an International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005 to 2015.

6. It is essential for churches and Christian agencies to work together and to seek co-operation with other partners, including other faith traditions and NGOs, and particularly those organizations that work with vulnerable and marginalized populations who hold similar ethical convictions. It is necessary to engage in debate and action on water policies, including dialogue with governments and multilateral or corporate institutions. This is essential to promote the significance of the right to water and to point to alternative ways of living, which are more respectful of ecological processes and more sustainable in the longer term.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brasil, 14-23 February 2006:

adopts the statement on Water for Life and calls on the churches and ecumenical partners to work together with the aim to:

promote awareness of and take all necessary measures for preservation and protection of water resources against over-consumption and pollution as an integral part of the right to life;

undertake advocacy efforts for development of legal instruments and mechanisms that guarantee the implementation of the right to water as a fundamental human right at the local, national, regional and international levels;

foster co-operation of churches and ecumenical partners on water concerns through participation in the Ecumenical Water Network;

support community based initiatives whose objectives are to enable local people to exercise responsible control, manage and regulate water resources and prevent the exploitation for commercial purposes;

urge governments and international aid agencies to give priority to and allocate adequate funds and other resources for programmes designed to provide access to and make water available to local communities and also promote development of proper sanitation systems and projects, taking into account the needs of people with disabilities to have access to this clean water and sanitation service;

monitor disputes and agreements related to water resources and river basins to ensure that such agreements contain detailed, concrete and unambiguous provisions for conflict resolution;

contribute to the International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005 – 2015, by exploring and highlighting the ethical and spiritual dimension of water crisis.

Minute on the elimination of nuclear arms

1. Speaking out of love for the world and in obedience to the God of all life, we raise our voice again with convictions the church has held since nuclear weapons were used six decades ago.

2. In the nuclear age, God who is slow to anger and abounding in mercy has granted humanity many days of grace. Through the troubled years of the Cold War and into the present time, it has become clear that, in this as in other ways, God has saved us from ourselves. Although many were and are deceived, God is not mocked (Gal 6:7). If vengeance in daily

life is for God (Rom 12:19), surely the vengeance of nuclear holocaust⁴ is not for human hands. Our place is to labour for life with God.

3. Churches are not alone in upholding the sanctity of life. One shared principle of world religions is greater than all weapons of mass destruction and stronger than any 'balance of *terror*': we must do to others what we would have them do to us. Because we do not want nuclear weapons used against us, our nation cannot use nuclear weapons against others. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki there is uranium within the golden rule.

4. Indeed, governments in the year 2000 made an "unequivocal undertaking" to meet their obligations and eliminate all nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

5. Yet instead of progress there is crisis. The basic and compelling bargain at the heart of the treaty is being broken. The five recognised nuclear powers, who pledged "the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals" under the NPT, are now finding new military and political roles for nuclear arms instead. The other 184 states in the treaty pledged never to have nuclear weapons. If the bargain to eliminate nuclear weapons is being broken, they for their part may have an incentive to seek the weapons too. When states with the biggest conventional arsenals insist for their security on also having nuclear weapons, states with smaller arsenals will feel less secure and do the same. It must be recognized as well that external political and military pressure can provoke countries to pursue nuclear weapons. In short, there is nuclear proliferation now despite the NPT.

6. As more states acquire nuclear arms the risk of nuclear weapons falling into non-state hands increases — just when it is an international imperative to wisely overcome the violence of terrorism. Nuclear arms do not deter non-state agents and nuclear action against them would cause gross slaughter while shattering international law and morality. These are scenarios the parties to the NPT are obligated to prevent.

7. On the question of morality, all people of faith are needed in our day to expose the fallacies of nuclear doctrine. These hold, for example, that weapons of mass destruction are agents of stability; that governments have nuclear arms so they will never use them; and that there is a role in the human affairs of this small planet for a bomb more powerful than all the weapons ever used. With our aging sisters and brothers who survived atomic bombs in Japan and tests in the Pacific and former Soviet Union, and as people emerging from a century of genocides and global wars, we are bound to confront these follies before it is too late.

⁴ Dissent was registered from Rev. Helga Rudolf, delegate of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, concerning the theological implications of the expression "nuclear holocaust". She feels that the word "holocaust" is being used without awareness of its original Biblical meaning as a burnt offering to God. She would have preferred to say "nuclear disaster", thus avoiding this misunderstanding and taking responsibility for our use of language.

8. Churches must prevail upon governments until they recognize the incontrovertible immorality of nuclear weapons.

9. From its birth as a fellowship of Christian churches the WCC has condemned nuclear weapons for their “widespread and indiscriminate destruction” and as “sin against God” in modern war (First WCC Assembly, 1948), recognised early that the only sure defence against nuclear weapons is prohibition, elimination and verification (Second Assembly, 1954) and, *inter alia*, called citizens to “press their governments to ensure national security without resorting to the use of weapons of mass destruction” (Fifth Assembly, 1975).

10. Existing WCC policy urges all states to meet their treaty obligations to reduce and then destroy nuclear arsenals with adequate verification. Our position is that the five original nuclear weapons states (in alphabetical order: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) must pledge never to be the first to use nuclear weapons, never threaten any use, and remove their weapons from high alert status and from the territory of non-nuclear states. WCC policy calls the three states that have not signed the NPT (India, Israel, Pakistan), the one that has withdrawn (North Korea) and the one threatening to withdraw (Iran), respectively, to join the treaty as non-nuclear states, to make a fully verifiable return and not to withdraw (WCC Executive Committee Statement on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 19.02.04; WCC Central Committee Statement on Nuclear Disarmament, NATO Policy and the Churches, 05.02.01). These measures have broad support across the international community, yet they remain undone.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brasil, 14-23 February 2006:

a) *Adopts* the minute on the Elimination of Nuclear Arms;

b) *Calls* each member church to urge its own government to pursue the unequivocal elimination of nuclear weapons under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Governments that have decided to abstain from developing nuclear weapons should be affirmed; states that are not signatories of NPT must be pressed to sign the treaty as non-nuclear states.

c) *Urges* churches to work to overcome the ignorance and complacency in society concerning the nuclear threat, especially to raise awareness in generations with no memory of what these weapons do.

d) *Strongly recommends* that, until the goal of nuclear disarmament is achieved, member churches prevail upon their governments to take collective responsibility for making international nuclear disarmament machinery work including mechanisms to verify compliance, for securing nuclear weapons and weapons-useable material from non-state actors, and for

supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency in its critical mission of monitoring fissile material and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

e) *Calls on* member churches and parishes to mobilise their membership to support and strengthen Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, which are established in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia and Africa and are proposed for other inhabited regions of the earth; and *especially commends* churches to engage other religions and to advocate for these zones during the WCC 'Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace – 2001-2010'.

Minute on mutual respect, responsibility and dialogue with people of other faiths

1. The international community must work together to nurture global respect for diversity, culture and religion. Religious communities and leaders have a special responsibility to promote tolerance and address ignorance about others. Representatives of 348 Churches from 120 countries, gathered in Porto Alegre, Brazil, at the 9th Assembly of the WCC, reaffirm their commitment to respectful dialogue and co-operation between people of different faiths and other convictions. Through dialogue we learn about the faith of the other and better understand their underlying pain and frustration. We see ourselves through the eyes of the other. We can also better perceive the role of religion in national and international politics⁵.
2. In a world where we recognise a growing interaction between religion and politics, many conflicts and tensions carry the imprint of religion. The WCC has always encouraged inter-faith dialogue both on the global and the local level. We urge member churches and national councils of churches to create platforms for such dialogues. Dialogue should be accompanied by co-operation where faith communities together can address the rest of civil society and governments on issues of common concern, and particularly when religion, holy places, minority rights and human rights are threatened.
3. Faced with the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed of Islam, starting in Denmark in September last year, we recognize it is crucial to strengthen dialogue and co-operation between Christians and Muslims. The publications have caused worldwide con-

⁵ Dissent was registered from:

Dr Audeh Quawas, delegate of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who objected to formulations in paragraphs 3 and 5. In paragraph 3, he wished for a statement opposing the assertion of "freedom of speech" as a justification for inflammatory acts by the media, and wished to replace the word "deplore" with "condemn". In paragraph 5, he wished for a stronger statement condemning "collective punishment" in response to the outcome of democratic elections.

Dr Emmanuel Clapsis, delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who objected to the failure to include, in paragraph 3, a reference to the disrespect by the media of religious symbols of all living faiths; and

The Most Rev. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, delegate of the Church of Nigeria, who felt that the word "tolerance" in paragraph 1 needed to be qualified by the adjective "positive".

troversies. Further publication and the violent reactions to them increase the tension. As people of faith we understand the pain caused by the disregard of something considered precious to faith. We deplore the publications of the cartoons. We also join with the voices of many Muslim leaders in deploring the violent reactions to the publications.

4. Freedom of speech is indeed a fundamental human right, which needs to be guaranteed and protected. It is both a right and a responsibility. It works best when it holds structures of power accountable and confronts misuse of power. By the publication of the cartoons, freedom of speech has been used to cause pain by ridiculing peoples' religion, values and dignity. Doing so, the foundation of this right is being devalued. We remind ourselves of what St. Peter wrote: "As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil – honour everyone" (1.Pet.2; 16-17). Misuse of the right to freedom of speech should be met with non-violent means like critique and expressions of firm disagreement.

5. We recognise that there are more than just religious aspects to the present tensions. Failure to find a just and peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, reluctance to accept outcomes of free elections, together with the war on Iraq and the war in Afghanistan add frustration to historical experiences marked by crusades and colonialism. In many parts of the world people identify as being politically and economically excluded, and they often experience that dominant powers and cultures apply double standards in dealing with issues which are important to them. In many countries in the rich and dominant parts of the world, integration policies have failed to welcome new minorities. Instead, they meet racism, stereotyping, xenophobia, and a lack of respect for their religion.

6. The real tension in our world is not between religions and beliefs, but between aggressive, intolerant and manipulative secular and religious ideologies. Such ideologies are used to legitimise the use of violence, the exclusion of minorities and political domination. The main victims of these types of controversies are religious minorities, living in a context of a different majority culture. Nevertheless, we recognise a growing respect and tolerance in all cultures. Many are learning that it is possible to be different, even to disagree and yet remain in calm dialogue and work together for the common good.

7. The recent crisis points to the need for secular states and societies to better understand and respect the role and significance of religion in a multicultural and globalised world, in particular as an essential dimension in human identity. This can help religion and people of faith to be instruments for bridging divisions between cultures and nations and to contribute to solving underlying problems.

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006:

a) *Adopts* the minute on Mutual Respect, Responsibility and Dialogue with People of other Faiths.

b) *Asks* member churches and ecumenical partners all over the world to express and demonstrate solidarity to those who are experiencing attacks on their religion and join them in defending the integrity of their faith by non-violent means.

c) *Recommends* all member churches, National and Regional Councils of Churches to contribute to the creation of platforms for dialogue with people of other faiths or none, and to address immediate as well as underlying social, economic and political reasons for division, including interaction with governments and secular authorities.

d) *Urges* member churches and ecumenical partners in contexts where religion interacts with politics in a way which causes division to deepen dialogue with leaders of other faiths, seek common approaches and develop common codes of conduct.

e) *Calls* on member churches and ecumenical partners all over the world to continue to address racism, caste, stereotyping and xenophobia in their respective societies and together with people of other faiths nurture a culture of respect and tolerance.

f) *Reaffirms* our commitment to the right to freedom of speech, at the same time as member churches are called to contribute to a needed reflection on how to uphold the need for ethical behaviour and good judgement in using this right.

Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee

The following report was presented to and received by the Assembly.

Its resolutions were proposed by the Programme Guidelines Committee and approved by the Assembly through consensus.

Dissent expressed by Assembly delegates is recorded as endnotes.

Introduction

1. One of the primary tasks of each Assembly of the World Council of Churches is to review the work and activities of the Council since its last Assembly and to set directions and priorities for the Council's programme in the future.

2. The Programme Guidelines Committee (PGC) of this Assembly has taken its tasks seriously, using as a starting point the report *From Harare to Porto Alegre*, the Pre-Assembly Programme Evaluation and Recommendations from the 2005 Central Committee, and a background paper, entitled "A Changing World," prepared by WCC staff. Each of the PGC members also attended an Ecumenical Conversation to listen to Assembly delegates about future WCC priorities. Finally, the PGC shared in dialogue and reflection on the reports of

the Moderator, the General Secretary, the thematic plenaries, hearing sessions, and many suggestions and ideas coming from Mutirão participants and constituency groups seeking to discern the mind of the Assembly and the call of God related to the unique role of the WCC within the ecumenical movement.

3. In presenting this report, the PGC has been aware that the work of the Policy Reference Committee has reviewed, and will address, several important programme initiatives since the Harare Assembly related to strengthening and deepening relationships among the member churches (e.g., the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC), with ecumenical partners, and with other Christian churches (e.g., the Joint Working Group with the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostals, etc.).

4. While the wealth of the input gathered by the PGC cannot be included in our Report to the Assembly, substantive documentation – including the reports from the 22 Ecumenical Conversations; the statements coming from constituency groups (youth, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities); the various proposals on specific issues from Mutirão workshops – will be referred to future governing bodies of the WCC in the important work of developing specific future programmes for the WCC. That documentation will inform them in their task of translating the broad policy directions included in this Report into programme.

Resolution:

5. The Ninth Assembly *receives* with appreciation the report *From Harare to Porto Alegre* and the “Pre-Assembly Evaluation and Recommendations from the 2005 Central Committee”¹.

The context of our work

6. The Porto Alegre Assembly has taken place against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world. It is on this stage, even as the drama of changing contexts unfolds, that the churches are called to fulfil their mission and calling. Changes are taking place everywhere, and all are related: the changing ecclesial and ecumenical contexts (including church geography, statistics, and secularization), as well as the changing political, economic and social contexts (including growing inequalities, environmental destruction, migration, violence and terror). These changes present immense challenges to the churches and to the WCC that call for courageous visions of hope and greater commitment to make visible God’s gift of unity and reconciliation in Christ before our divided churches, societies, and world. We were greatly encouraged by how our Latin American hosts presented their history of struggle and hope

¹ Dissent was registered from Bishop Barbel Wartenberg-Potter, delegate from the Evangelical Church in Germany, who feels that the Central Committee’s decision on “common prayer” hinders God’s Spirit from speaking in diverse and inclusive images and symbols.

in responding to the challenges their continent is facing. However, concerns were expressed about the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendants in the life of the church and in society in Latin America.

7. We have been reminded that, "A divided church cannot have a credible witness in a broken world; it cannot stand against the disintegrating and disorienting forces of globalization and enter into meaningful dialogue with the world" (Moderator's Report, Para 17). We turn to God and pray, "God, in your grace, transform our lives, our churches, our nations and world". All programmes and activities of the WCC are thus to be responsive to this changing context in seeking to be a faithful expression of God's justice, peace, care for creation, healing, reconciliation and salvation: the "fullness" of life for all.

Our vision and our goals

8. In its work at this first WCC Assembly in the 21st century, the PGC reaffirmed the stated purpose and functions of the WCC (as expressed in the Constitution, para. III.) as the basis for its work: "*The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.*" In addition, that paragraph affirms as goals of the Council that it will:

promote the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through theological dialogue and the sharing of human, spiritual and material resources with one another;

facilitate common witness; express their commitment to diakonia in serving human need;

nurture the growth of an ecumenical consciousness;

assist each other in relationships to and with people of other faiths; and,

foster renewal and growth through unity, worship, mission and service.

9. These purposes and functions demonstrate the breadth of the vision of the WCC, and provide a foundation for the programmatic work of the Council.

Resolution:

10. The Ninth Assembly *re-affirms* the document "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC" (referred to in *From Harare to Porto Alegre*, pp. 175-181) as an expression of the vision of the WCC as a fellowship of churches and as a servant of the one ecumenical movement. Ways need to be found to make the content of the CUV document more accessible and understandable in order to facilitate greater ownership by the churches and by the ecumenical movement at large.

Guiding principles and methodological recommendations

11. Building upon the very helpful material and recommendations in the “Programme Evaluation Report from the 2005 Central Committee” (referred to in *From Harare to Porto Alegre*, pp.203-216), and receiving a strong and sobering recommendation from the Finance Committee of this Assembly related to the anticipated financial situation of the WCC in the coming years, the PGC identified seven basic principles to guide the WCC in setting its programme priorities in the future:

to keep its focus upon what the WCC uniquely might do as a global fellowship of churches in providing leadership to the whole of the ecumenical movement;

to do less, to do it well, in an integrated, collaborative and interactive approach;

to lift up its central task of the churches calling one another to visible unity;

to keep in tension the work of dialogue and advocacy, of building relationships and promoting social witness among churches and with different sectors in society;

to foster greater ownership and participation by the churches in building as much as possible on initiatives of the churches and partner organizations;

to bring a prophetic voice and witness to the world in addressing the urgent and turbulent issues of our times in a focused way;

to communicate WCC activities to the churches and the world in a timely and imaginative way.

12. The PGC also identified several methodological elements in defining how future WCC life and work would be carried out, including:

articulating a clear theological basis for all of its work;

developing a comprehensive planning, monitoring and evaluation process that will include a clear time-line and goals;

designing a strategy for communication, engagement and ownership by the churches;

facilitating the coordinating role of the WCC in seeking partnerships in networking and advocacy with other ecumenical organizations, including Christian World Communions, REOs, NCCs, Specialized Ministries, faith-based organizations, and NGOs (as appropriate) – with the hope that many of these programmes can be implemented in collaborative ways of working;

encouraging capacity-building of member churches and ecumenical partners;

accompanying churches and peoples in critical situations and enabling and facilitating their action.

Resolution:

13. The Ninth Assembly *endorses* these guiding principles and methodological elements as the basis for establishing the Council's future programme priorities.

Major areas of engagement

14. In light of the changing context, the vision and purpose of the WCC, and the guiding principles and methodological elements, the PGC offers four major interactive "areas of engagement" for shaping the future life and work of the Council. Each of these emphases is already reflected in the current programmes of the WCC. What is being proposed here is that there be greater integration among the programmes and standing Commissions (Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, International Affairs), while exploring greater collaboration with current ecumenical partners and specialized ministries in development of these emphases in the future.

15. Three additional words of introduction to these areas of engagement:

The PGC strongly endorses promoting ecumenical leadership development of youth in the life of the WCC, including the full participation of youth in all programmes of the WCC. Youth voices, concerns and presence must be brought more directly into the decision-making and leadership of the work and governance of the Council.

The PGC continues to affirm and celebrate the role and contributions of women in all areas and arenas in the life of the WCC, and endorses the continued participation of women in the whole of the WCC.

The PGC urges that the WCC seek the full inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and Dalits, people of African descent, persons with disabilities and marginalized people all over the world in its life, work and decision-making.

Unity, spirituality and mission

16. Seeking unity and engaging in common mission and evangelism have been foundational elements in the ecumenical movement. New understandings of both unity and mission have continued to develop in the life of the WCC as member churches have engaged each other in responding to their growing relationships and expanding encounter with the diversity of theologies, ecclesiologies, and traditions. Future work in the area of mission and evangelism should engage the churches in their commitment to explore new ways of ecclesial life, fresh ways of experiencing the Christian faith, and the discovery of new contextual ways of proclaiming the gospel, including a critique of competitive missional activities.

17. Here in Porto Alegre, the need of the WCC and its member churches to focus upon the nature of Christian spirituality and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and the world

has become ever more urgent and obvious, both for the integrity of our work for visible unity and in our mission to the world. Unity, spirituality and mission are interrelated, and their mutuality is dependent upon each receiving distinct and dedicated attention by the WCC and its member churches.

In the coming period, it is proposed that comprehensive attention be given to unity, spirituality, and mission, both theologically and practically. Such focus will deepen the fellowship of the WCC churches and broaden that fellowship to the vast and growing numbers of churches and movements that presently have no relationship with ecumenical bodies.

Ecumenical formation

18. One of the issues that challenges the whole of the ecumenical movement today is that of ecumenical formation. As reported by the General Secretary in his report to this Assembly, "If contemporary Christians, including the church leadership, are to participate creatively and responsibly in the search for unity, and grow together, appropriate means of ecumenical formation must be offered to enable better, richer contributions to our common life." This is especially true for the students, young adults, laity and women in our churches as they increasingly take on leadership roles in the ecumenical movement for the 21st century.

19. The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey of the WCC was highlighted as a model for ecumenical formation, especially in its efforts in recent years in expanding its programme to include evangelicals and Pentecostals in its courses and seminars, as well as reaching out to provide greater inter-religious encounter. Providing a platform for churches and ecumenical partners working on challenges of science and technology to faith in cooperation with other parts of the WCC could be another opportunity. These trends are suggestive of the way forward, and a cause of hope.

20. Ecumenical formation also includes the role of the WCC in creating "safe spaces" for cross-cultural and cross-theological encounter as to engage in honest encounter around issues that divide our churches and our communities, in particular, to continue the dialogue on issues such as family life and human sexuality.

Global justice

21. Throughout this Assembly there has been the urgent call to work together in the ecumenical movement for a dynamic, global understanding of justice. Justice requires transformation of relationships at all levels of life in society and in nature towards life in dignity in just and sustainable communities (transformative justice):

responding to those who suffer the consequences of injustice, racism and casteism,

denouncing the scandal of a world divided along lines of wealth and poverty and contributing to the transformation of unjust economic and social structures,

integrating the care of creation and faith perspectives and the use and mis-use of science and new technologies such as bio-technologies, information technologies, surveillance and security technologies, energy technologies, etc.,

challenging and facilitating the church's response to HIV/AIDS,

and including a clear voice in advocacy and prophetic diakonia as . (The PGC notes that diakonia is understood not only to include service to the poor and marginalized, but also as an inseparable part of Christian identity and witness to societies, starting from life in family and community,

engaging in efforts and processes aiming at conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Such work will require the WCC and its member churches "to re-direct our programmes toward more intentionally building truly inclusive and just communities which safeguard diversity, where different identities and unity interact, and where the rights and obligations of all are fully respected in love and fellowship" (Report of General Secretary, p. 14).

22. In the coming years the PGC recommends that a follow-up of the AGAPE process be undertaken and expanded to engage a wider on-going dialogue between religion and politics, the work of theological reflection and solid political, economic and social analysis, and sharing practical, positive approaches from the churches. Ethical Public Voice and

Prophetic witness to the world

22. In fulfilling its historic responsibility on behalf of its member churches, the WCC is challenged to be a strong, credible ethical voice as it offers a prophetic witness to the world. This voice and witness must be spiritually and theologically grounded if the churches are to be heard among competing voices in the world. Churches have a contribution to make to strengthen multilateral international cooperation and the international rule of law in dealing with human rights, militarism and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

23. At this Assembly the urgent need for churches and the WCC to engage in inter-religious cooperation and dialogue was strongly affirmed. In its future engagement with other religions, it is important for the WCC to continue its work in the context of religious plurality and to further develop dialogue and common action related to political social, theological or ethical issues.

24. This Assembly marked the mid-term of the initiative launched at the Harare Assembly on the Decade to Overcome Violence. For the second half of the decade, the PGC affirmed that the style of networking local and regional initiatives in peace-making should increasingly shape the WCC's programmatic life and work. In addition to the regional foci, the DOV should be attentive to situations of deep crisis , such as Northern Uganda and Haiti.

Resolution:

25. The Ninth Assembly affirms these four areas of engagement in shaping the WCC's future life and work.

25. The PGC recommends that the regional foci be continued; that more sharing of successful examples be developed to encourage churches and local congregations to respond to overcoming violence in their own contexts; that a process of wide consultation be undertaken towards developing an ecumenical declaration on "just peace"; and finally, that the conclusion of the DOV in 2010 be marked by major and significant initiatives.

Resolution:

26. In particular, in regard to specific programme areas that have been identified in pursuing these four "areas of engagement", the Ninth Assembly:

affirms that comprehensive attention be given to unity, spirituality, and mission, both theologically and practically. The WCC and its member churches are encouraged to address the sharp ecclesiological questions set out in the report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, and to give priority to the questions of unity, catholicity, baptism and prayer.

encourages churches on local, national, regional and global levels to commit themselves to the task of continuing ecumenical formation for all. In this role, the WCC should facilitate and initiate dialogue and possible cooperation between religious and political actors on the role of the church in civil society and between religions in areas of mutual understanding ².

affirms that a follow-up of the AGAPE process be undertaken and expanded, in collaboration with other ecumenical partners and organizations, to engage in (1) the work of theological reflection on these issues that arise out of the centre of our faith; (2) solid political, economic and social analysis; (3) on-going dialogue between religious, economic and political actors; and (4) sharing practical, positive approaches from the churches ³.

in looking to the second half of the DOV, *endorses* that the regional foci be continued; that more sharing of successful examples be developed to encourage churches and local congregations

² Dissent was registered from:

Hulda Gudmundsdottir, delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, who wished to insert the words "focusing also on dividing issues such as human sexuality" at the end of the first sentence.

Four delegates who wished to insert the words "focusing especially on youth, women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, and people of African descent" at the end of the first sentence. The four delegates were: Carmen Landsdowne, delegate from the United Church of Canada; Rev. Robina Winbush, Presbyterian Church (USA); Rev. Dr. Tyrone Pitts, Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.; and Mr. David Palopaa, Church of Sweden.

³ Dissent was registered from Herr Klaus Heidel, delegate from the Evangelical Church in Germany, who wished to put the main emphasis of the recommendation on concrete activities and action.

gations to respond to overcoming violence in their own contexts supported by international mutual visits; that a process of wide consultation be undertaken towards developing an ecumenical declaration on “just peace”; and finally, that the conclusion of the DOV be marked by an international Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

Post-assembly planning

27. The period between the Assembly and the 2006 Central Committee meeting will be a time of intensive reflection led by the WCC leadership in consultation with churches and key ecumenical partners to receive the policy guidance from the Assembly and shape its programmatic work.

Resolutions:

28. In looking to its task of shaping future programmes for the WCC, the Ninth Assembly *approves* the following process:

a working group made up of the leadership of the Assembly’s Programme Guidelines Committee, Policy Reference Committee, Public Issues Committee and Finance Committee be asked to accompany the WCC leadership in developing future programme recommendations;

clear, well-functioning planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms be established for each programme;

a clear distinction be made between issues that are either long-term, time-bound, or specific urgent;

a two-way communication strategy be developed for each programme and carried out with the various constituencies;

clear exit strategies be established in phasing out, reconfiguring, or reshaping programmes taking into account both the limited human and financial resources of the WCC and also the possibilities to cooperate and share responsibility with other ecumenical partners;

sustained dialogue with member churches and specialized ministries regarding ways of generating additional financial support to programmatic work of the WCC.

29. The Ninth Assembly *affirms* that WCC should claim a clearer and stronger public profile in its witness to the world. To that effect it is hoped that the WCC will focus its energy and attention on a limited number of issues that cry out for response by the churches together. HIV/AIDS (including the ecclesiological implications of this pandemic in most parts of our world) should be one of these issues.

Report of the Policy Reference Committee

The following report was presented to and received by the Assembly.

Its resolutions were proposed by the Policy Reference Committee and approved by the Assembly through consensus.

Mandate and overview

1. "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21:5)

The ecumenical movement, inspired by the Holy Spirit, seeks to promote the renewal of our churches and God's whole creation as integral to the growth towards unity. It is in this broad framework that the Policy Reference Committee (PRC) did its work.

2. The PRC has been asked to work in an integrated way with the Programme Guidelines Committee and Public Issues Committee of the Assembly to offer one coherent outcome within their three reports that will guide future policies and the programmatic work of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The PRC was specifically directed to consider the changing ecclesial context and the relational dynamics in the wider ecumenical movement while proposing policy guidelines for the future on the fundamental and strategic questions of relationships.

3. The reports of the Moderator and the General Secretary were received with appreciation by the PRC, in particular, the deeply spiritual tone of both reports reflecting upon the theme of the Assembly "God in your grace, transform the world". The vision for the Ninth Assembly and also for the ecumenical movement in the twenty-first century derives from our self-understanding as a faithful, praying community of Christians dedicated to witnessing to the world together, in relationship with one another by the grace of God. The quest for the visible unity of the church remains at the heart of the WCC.

4. Our ultimate vision is that we will achieve, by God's grace, the visible unity of Christ's Church and will be able to welcome one another at the Lord's table, to reconcile our ministries, and to be committed together to the reconciliation of the world. We must never lose sight of this dream, and we must take concrete steps now to make it a reality. The report of the Moderator articulated specific hopes and dreams related to work already begun around (i) the common date for Easter, (ii) Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, and (iii) preparations for a single ecumenical assembly, dreams that echo those stated by the founders of the WCC.

Resolution:

5. The Ninth Assembly sets as its goal that we will have made substantial progress towards realizing these hopes and dreams by the Tenth Assembly. Witness to the world of the

progress made toward visible unity can include agreement among all of the Christian churches for calculation of the annual date for celebration of the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, for mutual recognition by all churches of one Baptism, understanding that there are some who do not observe the rite of Baptism in water but share in the desire to be faithful to Christ, and for convening an ecumenical assembly that would assemble all churches to celebrate their fellowship in Jesus Christ and to address common challenges facing the church and humanity — all on the way toward visible unity and a shared Eucharist.

Emerging trends in the life of the churches and their ecumenical implications

Ecumenical relationships in the twenty-first century

6. Understanding the rapid and radical changes in the shape of global Christianity and the life of the churches is essential to addressing the shape of ecumenical relationships in the twenty-first century. The PRC suggests that a report, on changing ecclesial and ecumenical contexts, be prepared and updated on a regular basis in advance of meetings of the Central Committee during the next period.

7. The Assembly was called upon by the General Secretary to put “relationships in the centre of the ecumenical movement”. The PRC echoes this call, understanding the creative tension that exists at the various levels of relationship engaged by the WCC, particularly between being a fellowship while also responding to the changing ecumenical landscape and responding to the world.

8. The process of reconfiguring the ecumenical movement is in large part an effort to “choreograph” the intricate relationships among the various ecumenical instruments and new ecumenical partners, so that clarity, transparency, communication and cooperative efforts mark those relationships, allowing the ecumenical movement as a whole to offer to the world and to the regions and local churches the coherent grace-filled spiritual message of Christianity. The PRC took note of the messages coming from many sources gathered in the Ninth Assembly, as well as the theme at the heart of the Assembly. The process that has been called “reconfiguration” should be understood not as patching up the existing ecumenical structures, but as a dynamic process to deepen the relationship of the ecumenical movement to its spiritual roots and missionary identity, reaffirm the relationship of the ecumenical instruments to the churches, clarify the relationships among the various ecumenical instruments and ensuring that the message and the effort be coordinated and coherent.

9. The PRC noted with appreciation the efforts toward this end, including the two consultations that have taken place with broad participation, the mapping process that described the various ecumenical actors, the recommendations that resulted from those consultations, as well as the continuing dynamic, inclusive dialogue that has followed from that work.

Resolution:

10. The Ninth Assembly:

a) calls upon the member churches, and ecumenical instruments, to encourage the WCC in its role as leader of the process engaging the wider ecumenical movement in constructive collaboration (reconfiguration), including WCC member churches, Christian World Communions, Regional Ecumenical Organizations, National Councils of Churches, World Mission Bodies, Specialized Ministries, as well as Christian churches not currently in membership in the WCC, in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current status of the ecumenical movement and offer strategies for enhancing the strengths and addressing the weaknesses;

b) affirms the appointment of a continuation committee as recommended during the consultation on "Ecumenism in the Twenty-first Century" (Chavannes-de-Bogis, December 2004) that will report to the Central Committee to continue this process during this next term maintaining a primary role for the member churches;

c) requests that the WCC explores the implications of new forms of mission and ecumenism for the reconfiguration process, building on the method and results of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens (2005).

Strengthening and deepening the WCC and relationships among member churches

Who we are and how we work together

11. The Common Understanding and Vision document (CUV) serves as a foundational statement of the nature of the fellowship among the member churches of the WCC and as the churches relate to other ecumenical partners. The committee affirms the centrality of this statement, urges that the CUV be more fully incorporated into the life and witness of the WCC at all levels, and continue to guide the programmatic work and relationships of the WCC.

Resolution:

12. The report of the General Secretary to the Ninth Assembly articulated urgent calls for deep change – not incremental change – in the way the WCC conducts its work during the next term. The most important is the call by the General Secretary for "a more integrated and interactive approach to programmes and for relationships" in the Council's future work. In the spirit of this report, therefore, the Assembly instructs the General Secretary, in consultation with the Central Committee, to implement clear and consistent changes to the working style, organizational structure and staffing of the WCC necessary to meet the cur-

rent and future challenges to the ecumenical movement. The PRC is particularly interested in ensuring that all programmes, consultations, visits or statements initiated by the WCC are integrated and coordinated with the work being undertaken by staff in other programme areas.

13. The PRC affirms the importance of providing possibilities for young adults to participate in meaningful decision-making roles both in the churches and in the WCC, and urges that member churches provide additional opportunities for their young adults to benefit from ecumenical formation, including theological training at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey.

Resolutions:

14. In light of the meeting of the Moderator and the General Secretary with young adult delegates to the Ninth Assembly, and the Statement on Youth Contribution delivered to the Assembly, the Assembly directs the Central Committee to create a representative body of young adults who would coordinate the various roles of young adults connected to the WCC and facilitate communication between them. Such a body would create space for a meaningful participation of young adults in the life and decision making of the WCC, and would be able to hold the WCC accountable to its goals regarding young adults.

15. The PRC noted the persistence of references to "persons with disabilities" which can be an acknowledgement of their absence in leadership and in decision-making processes. The PRC will, however, note that this can serve to mark the continuing marginalisation of those persons living with different disabilities. The Assembly recommends that the WCC work with representatives of the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network to articulate in an even more bold and creative way, consistent with Christian theology, ways to make the churches fully inclusive communities and the ecumenical movement a more open space for all human beings.

16. The PRC affirmed the recent actions of the Central Committee on human rights, Indigenous Peoples and language loss. The Assembly recommends to strengthen the participation and visibility of Indigenous Peoples within the WCC. The Assembly considers this an essential step for deepening the relationships among WCC member churches. The Assembly in particular urges the WCC to address the main areas which are problematic for Indigenous churches in its policy directions. The Assembly considers strengthening relationships with Indigenous Peoples an opportunity for the fellowship to gain new insights on the importance of place, land, language and theology of creation, as well as creative perspectives on grace and transformation.

17. The PRC appreciates the new consensus style of discernment for reaching decisions in the WCC and notes the opportunity this offers to the churches. A particular concern was

expressed that the length of the reports of the Moderator and the General Secretary on the one hand, and the schedule of the Assembly on the other, limited meaningful discussion despite the stated goals of the consensus process, either during the presentation plenary or in committee. The PRC suggests that the shift to consensus process in decision-making also requires changes in methodology and process in order to create adequate space for consensus to occur. This requires an evaluation of current models of reporting.

18. The Central Committee engaged in a process of self-evaluation in the months immediately preceding the Ninth Assembly. The PRC thanks those who conducted that evaluation and receives with appreciation the report of the Evaluation Committee. The PRC suggests that clear mechanisms for planning and evaluation of the programmes and work and for transparent and mutually accountable working methods between the WCC and its member churches be established in advance of the second full meeting of the Central Committee, with particular attention to evaluating the transition to consensus and its consequences for working methods.

Relationships among member churches

19. Work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC marked this past term of the WCC. The PRC affirms this important achievement of the Council that deepens the relationships among member churches and helps dispel misperceptions between families of churches. In particular, the Committee urges the WCC to stress the importance of this work as it implements the policies adopted by the Central Committee, grows into the consensus process of discernment for decision-making, and engages in the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement. The committee welcomed the revisions to the Constitution and Rules of the WCC, including especially the new ways of relating to one another in our work as member churches working towards consensus in discerning ways to work together, clarified understanding of membership in the WCC, and the new opportunities for relationship to the WCC through the category of "churches in association with the WCC."

20. The PRC noted that each new term of the Central Committee provides an opportunity for informal encounters between and among representatives of member churches, to deepen understanding of the ecclesial commonalities and particularities of each member church. The PRC urges the WCC to make space for this type of interaction at every opportunity, to encourage the practice of "Living Letters" that provides an opportunity for personal encounters with churches in their own contexts, so that the churches come to know one another, and to encourage local collaborative consultations of Faith and Order documents.

21. The PRC also urges the WCC to listen to the member churches and strive towards greater coherence in the various relations with them, increasing cooperation, exchange of information and consultation among all involved persons (including WCC staff) and ecumenical partners.

The Call to be the One Church

22. The PRC has received with deep appreciation the document entitled *Called to be the One Church* (the Ecclesiology Text).

Resolution:

The Ninth Assembly:

- a) adopts the Ecclesiology Text as an invitation and challenge to the member churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue;
- b) calls upon each member church to respond to the ten questions at the conclusion of the Ecclesiology Text with the expectation that, by the Tenth Assembly, each member church will have so responded;
- c) directs the WCC, through the commission on Faith and Order, to prepare periodic reports to the Central Committee of the number and content of responses received, so that responses can inform the direction of work towards deepening the understanding among member churches and furthering progress towards the visible unity of the Church. Such a process would go some way to addressing the fundamental ecclesiological issues raised by the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC.

Relationships with ecumenical partners

Christian World Communions

23. The WCC is strengthened by interaction with the Christian World Communions. Its spirituality, witness, and work are enhanced by cooperative efforts with Christian World Communions towards building Christian unity. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral dialogues have contributed to a number of unity agreements and have enhanced understanding and cooperation among churches. Cooperative efforts in areas of witness, mission, diakonia and ecumenical formation are integral to the life of the WCC. The importance of strengthening this relationship is articulated in the *Common Understanding and Vision* document and affirmed by the Harare Assembly.

24. The PRC notes that the various structures and self-understanding of the Christian World Communions and of the member churches of the WCC results in a variety of ways of relating to the WCC, and welcomes the ongoing relationship with the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, whilst recognizing that not all member churches find themselves represented in this body. Some Christian World Communions and the General Secretary have called for new ways of relating CWCS to the WCC, including new possibilities related to future WCC Assemblies, expanded space in the structure of

WCC Assemblies for confessional meetings, and the vision ultimately of a broadly inclusive ecumenical assembly.

Resolution:

25. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) affirms the important specific role and place of the Christian World Communions in the ecumenical movement and as partners of the WCC, and particularly acknowledges the importance of the role of Christian World Communions in both multi-lateral and bilateral dialogues and reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement;
- b) directs that the WCC jointly consult with the Christian World Communions to explore the significance and implications of overlap of membership, coordination of programmes, and other common efforts between the WCC and the Christian World Communions;
- c) directs that the WCC initiate, within the next year and in consultation with the Christian World Communions, a joint consultative commission to discuss and recommend ways to further strengthen the participation of Christian World Communions in the WCC;
- d) directs that the WCC explore the feasibility of a structure for WCC assemblies that would provide expanded space for Christian World Communions and confessional families to meet, for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agendas. Early in the term of this next Central Committee, a decision would be expected as to whether the next WCC Assembly should be so structured;
- e) directs that United and Uniting churches be included in this process.

Regional Ecumenical Organizations and National Councils of Churches

26. The Regional Ecumenical Organizations and National Councils of Churches worldwide comprise expressions of the ecumenical movement with a wide variety of structures and varying degrees of relationship with the work and programmes of the WCC. These independently constituted organizations have a composition of membership that is broader than that of the WCC, some including as full members representatives of bishop's conferences of the Roman Catholic Church and Evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are not members of the WCC. The current relationship between the WCC, Regional Ecumenical Organizations and National Councils of Churches, is mutually enriching and important to their common work and witness to the world, yet lacks clarity as to the specific character, role and particular strengths of each ecumenical instrument and the relationship of each to the local churches, and also lacks coherence of common vision and cooperative efforts.

Resolution:

27. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) affirms the specific and important relationship between the WCC and the Regional Ecumenical Organizations and the National Councils of Churches as essential partners in the work of the ecumenical movement;
- b) encourages the WCC to continue to facilitate the annual meetings of leaders of Regional Ecumenical Organizations in order to (i) bring more clarity to the specific character of each ecumenical instrument, (ii) improve the process of consultation, particularly in areas in which work and programmes might overlap and where statements or efforts of the WCC might have particularly sensitive local ramifications, (iii) articulate an agreement of shared values, and (iv) improve cooperation in programming and coherence of message so that each instrument of the ecumenical movement is undertaking the programmes and tasks most effectively suited to their strengths, the process to be overseen by the continuation committee formed following the consultation on Ecumenism in the Twenty-first Century (Chavannes-de-Bogis, 2004);
- c) endorses the recommendation of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC that the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity be asked to cosponsor a consultation of representatives of National Councils of Churches, Regional Ecumenical Organizations and episcopal conferences from places where the Roman Catholic Church is not in membership. The consultation should consider the document "Inspired by the Same Vision" and reflect on the experience others have gleaned regarding Catholic participation;
- d) directs that this consultation be held within the next two to four years, in order to (i) bring more clarity to the specific character of each ecumenical instrument, (ii) improve the process of consultation, particularly in areas in which work and programmes might overlap and where statements or efforts of the WCC might have particularly sensitive local ramifications, (iii) articulate an agreement of shared values, (iv) enhance relationships with the Roman Catholic Church by inviting the leadership of national bishops' conferences, and (v) improve cooperation in programming and coherence of message so that each instrument of the ecumenical movement is undertaking the programmes and tasks most effectively suited to their strengths, on the principle of subsidiarity, that is, ensuring that decisions are made closest to the people affected, and with the priority that programmes are preferable when they interconnect with regional, national or local initiatives.

Specialized ministries and agencies related to the WCC

28. The PRC received with interest and for information a report of the proposal for a new alliance of churches and church and ecumenical agencies engaged in development work

(Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development, PEAD), and understands that the formation of such a global alliance and its identity as an agency related to the WCC and its member churches, and/or related to the work of Action by Churches Together (ACT) and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), is still in progress.

Resolution:

29. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) affirms with appreciation the work and role of Specialized Ministries and their relationship to the WCC and to the diaconal work of the WCC and the member churches;
- b) asks the WCC to continue its leadership role in exploring with the agencies which have proposed the new alliance the most appropriate structure for that alliance to take in relating to the other ecumenical partners, particularly as the alliance would relate to and serve the specific diaconal tasks of member churches and relate to ACT and other existing ecumenical instruments, including Regional Ecumenical Organizations, taking into account the priorities that have been articulated;
- c) directs that the Central Committee encourage the continuing leadership role of the WCC in relation to this proposal.

Relationships with other christian churches

The Roman Catholic Church

30. The PRC received with appreciation the Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC and acknowledges with deep appreciation the past forty years of collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. Since the Second Vatican Council, major studies have resulted from this joint effort, deepening the mutual understanding and the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the WCC. Joint responsibility for preparing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, full membership in the commissions on Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, provision for staff in areas of mission and at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute have enhanced that collaboration, even while the Roman Catholic Church declines membership in the WCC. The member churches of the WCC continue to encourage and hope for an even more organic relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in the quest towards the visible unity of the Church.

Resolution:

31. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) receives the Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC and the report of the consultation, that marked the forty years of

collaboration, and expresses its appreciation to the members of the JWG for their work in the period 1999 – 2006;

- b) endorses the continuation of the Joint Working Group and its recommendations for future direction, but also asks the Joint Working Group, working with Faith and Order, to include in their agendas concrete steps in that context to realize the dreams described in the Moderator's report: for a common date for the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and mutual recognition by all churches of one Baptism understanding that there are some who do not observe the rite of Baptism in water but share in the desire to be faithful to Christ, and convening a common ecumenical assembly, including offering ways to deepen the theological basis of all ecumenical work and engage in work towards resolution of the theological divergences that still keep us apart.

Pentecostal churches

32. Porto Alegre, Brazil provided a dynamic setting for the Ninth Assembly to receive the Report from the Joint Consultative Group between the WCC and Pentecostal Churches, which the PRC forwards to the Assembly with appreciation for the work of that Group. This six-year effort is an example of efforts of the WCC to broaden the Council and the ecumenical movement and to respond to the dynamically changing landscape of Christian expression, whilst being mindful of the ecclesial realities that makes formal partnerships difficult. The PRC appreciates the extraordinary effort that has accompanied this process to provide the safe ecumenical space for this mutually beneficial open dialogue.

Resolution:

33. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) receives the Report of the Joint Consultative Group between the WCC and Pentecostals including the recommendations and the direction for future work, expresses its appreciation to the members of the Joint Consultative Group for their work in the period 2000 – 2005, and endorses the continuation of the Joint Consultative Group;
- b) recognizes the visible contribution of the Pentecostal churches in the dynamically changing Christian landscape, and the importance to the ecumenical movement of engaging in mutual learning and sustained dialogue with the Pentecostal churches.

Global Christian Forum

34. The Harare Assembly affirmed the proposal that the WCC facilitate the process identified in the Common Understanding and Vision document as the "Forum proposal". This process has included a series of meetings preparatory to gathering a broader representation of Christian churches than currently are members in the WCC for consultation on issues

common to all Christian churches and inter-church organizations. Several regional consultations have taken place, with participation from a wide range of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches not represented in the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church and from representatives of WCC member churches, gathering together at a global level representatives of all four main streams of Christianity. Demonstrating the timeliness of this initiative, given the changing global Christian landscape and to enhance a common Christian witness and solidarity in a fractured world, the Global Christian Forum process offers a fluid model of initiatives that can be facilitated by the WCC to welcome broader participation in the ecumenical journey.

35. The PRC noted the tension that will continue to be present as the WCC proceeds on the one hand to deepen its relationships among the member churches and explore the areas of theological convergence and divergence, while on the other hand encountering with ecclesial challenges presented by engaging with the broader Christian community. The committee reaffirms the centrality of the fellowship of member churches, the Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC, and the particular accomplishments of the Special Commission in deepening the relationships among the member churches, and notes the urgent need for the WCC to continue to facilitate gathering the broader Christian community in consultation and dialogue.

Resolution:

36. The Ninth Assembly:

- a) receives the report on the Global Christian Forum including the direction for future work and expresses its appreciation to the organizers of the consultations and the forum event;
- b) instructs that the WCC participate in the global forum event scheduled to take place in late 2007, and following that event conduct a formal and comprehensive evaluation of the concept and the process.

Relationships with other faiths

37. The WCC has committed itself to engaging in dialogue with partners of other faiths that is aimed at building trust, articulating common values, promoting mutual understanding, meeting common challenges and addressing conflictive and divisive issues. Interreligious dialogue is now more than ever an expression of the Council's essential identity engaging in the world, diffusing tensions, peacemaking, protecting human dignity and the rights of religious minorities. The PRC appreciates the strong reaffirmation of this work of the Council that was contained in the reports of the Moderator and the General Secretary and concurs that forming and deepening constructive, respectful, intentional relationships with others in

this pluralistic world is one of the most important efforts the WCC can model for its ecumenical partners and for member churches at the international and the grassroots levels.

Relationships with nations and world events

38. The WCC expresses its fellowship by engaging in the world as we have been called by Jesus Christ to engage the world – as witnesses to His love. The WCC is in a unique position to articulate values that signify human dignity. The WCC has made a mark in its history by providing prophetic response to this calling. Participants in the Ninth Assembly were moved by the various plenary presentations and interactions with the local churches to recommit to engage together with issues of economic justice and globalization, to fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic, to reaffirm solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS and to promote a culture of peace through the programmes of the Decade to Overcome Violence. The PRC acknowledges the essential significance of the work of the WCC interacting as the voice of Christian churches with secular world bodies. The PRC recognizes the significance of this expression of the WCC's responsibility for the churches toward the world as a privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement.

Conclusion

39. The PRC received with deep appreciation the reports of the General Secretary and the Moderator of the WCC, and thanks the Moderator, especially on this occasion of his final report to an Assembly of the WCC as Moderator, for his years of dedicated leadership of the WCC.

40. The PRC received with deep gratitude the various reports of efforts to initiate, maintain and deepen the relationships of the WCC with its member churches, with its ecumenical partners, and with other Christian Churches. It suggests a full and closer reading by anyone involved in the ecumenical movement. Recommendations from those reports are offered as recommendations of the PRC with the understanding that priority be given to programmes that strengthen the WCC in the search for visible unity, enhance its ability to represent the member churches, and build new bridges for relationships and trust with other Christian churches not currently within its fellowship.

41. We give thanks to God for our relationships with Christian World Communions, the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Churches, Regional Ecumenical Organizations and National Councils of Churches, Specialized Ministries, and the emerging Global Christian Forum. We request that the Assembly call on them all to join in a fresh commitment with the WCC and one another to create a renewed and unified ecumenical movement as we begin the third millennium of Christian history that will strengthen and deepen the fellowship of churches and enable us to be faithful in our common calling to the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Book Reviews

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler (eds), *God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2005, 250 pp, \$28.00

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, co-workers in mission for the Presbyterian Church USA, spent twenty-five years as theological educators in Central America. The name of Ross Kinsler is also intimately related to the development of the concept and practice of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) which he helped to enrich and expand worldwide during the years (1977-1983) when he served on the staff of the Programme on Theological Education of the World Council of Churches. Many of his articles on TEE, and on the theological training of the people of God in general, appeared in the quarterly Ministerial Formation which he edited during those years. The social and economic challenges in Latin America were always seen by Ross

and Gloria Kinsler as inseparable from, and central to, Christian faith. They formulated their ideas and concerns on the biblical dimension of economic justice in their book *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life: An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesial and Social Transformation*, published in 1999. These same concerns are reaffirmed powerfully in this new book, jointly edited, and bearing the significant title *God's Economy*. This is a unique collection of essays, written by outstanding biblical scholars in Latin America, which the Kinslers have carefully selected for the

benefit of a wider audience. The editors' own words in the Introduction of the book are instructive: «Over the years of ministry in Latin America, our understanding of spiritual life has come to focus upon the Biblical message of Sabbath and Jubilee, which is abundant life for all». The primary challenge of the twenty-first century, as the Kinslers state, is to overcome the present day economic order which condemns to poverty half of the world's population and threatens to damage irre-

versibly the very conditions of life on a global scale.

To review one by one the thirteen essays in *God's Economy* would not only be

tedious for the reader, but also a daunting task for the reviewer, given the condensed style of most of these essays. Let it just be said here that the first four essays (by Elza Tamez, Jorge Pixley, José Miguez Bonino and Pablo Richard) are grouped under the heading *Political and Economic Dimensions of the Bible*; while the essays in the second part (by Alicia Winters, Haroldo Reimer, José Severino Croatto and Carmiña Navia Velasco) and in the third part (by Leif E. Vaage, Ivoni Richter Reimer, René Krüger, Franklyn Pimentel Torres and Néstor O. Miguez) deal with the theme more specifically from the standpoint of the Old Testament and New Testament, respectively.

One approaches the book with some questions in mind: how can the Bible help in the human struggle to transform society? Can biblical scholars sustain ordinary deprived people in their struggle for life? A quotation from the Preface, by Pablo Richard (author also of one of the essays) provides some kind of an answer: «The problem today is the abyss between biblical studies (exegesis) and the people of God. This is being overcome in Latin America in two ways: on the one hand, by giving exegesis a pastoral orientation; on the other, by forming pastoral agents as much as possible in exegetical methods of biblical study». Pablo Richard goes on to suggest that overcoming this abyss will empower ordinary people to undertake the kind of «popular reading of the Bible» which highlights the Word of God

as fountain of life and ground of hope for the transformation of society.

The Foreword by Ched Myers is particularly instructive on the general making and substance of the book. We learn that the authors are «some of the finest Bible scholars in Latin America...who do their work in relationship with, and on behalf of prophetic people's move-

ments for justice throughout their hemisphere». Most of them are heirs of the Theology of Liberation of the 70s and 80s who now focus their attention on a careful re-reading of the entire biblical tradition «from the perspective of the marginalized». Myers underlines the fact that all the essays published in *God's Economy* first appeared in the *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana* (RIBLA), a highly regarded ecumenical quarterly that has «animated a renaissance in Latin American biblical studies in the last two decades».

By making these essays available to English speaking readers, Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler not only render a precious contribution to the ecumenical dialogue and debate on Social Ethics between North and South, but have also provided a valuable tool for all those who seek in the Christian tradition inspiration and strength to fight against contemporary destructive and dehumanizing powers.

Abaron Sapsejian formerly worked as general secretary of the Brazilian Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries (ASTE) and as a staff member of the WCC Programme on Theological Education.

Harald Schultze (ed.), *Berichte der Magdeburger Kirchenleitung zu den Tagungen der Provinzialsynode 1946 – 1989* (Reports of the Magdeburg church leadership to the meetings of the provincial synod 1946-1989), Göttingen : Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005, pp. 744

(*Arbeiten zur kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte : Reihe A, Quellen; Bd. 10* [Studies in contemporary church history: Series A, Sources; Vol. 10]) ISBN 3-525-55760-4, EUR 98.00

In the years following East Germany's peaceful revolution of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the role played by the Protestant church under communist rule became a highly contested issue. Initially the church was hailed for having provided a home for the church-based opposition that came to the fore in 1989.

Within a few years the contacts of some church officials with the Stasi, the East German state security service were revealed, and documents from the files of the Stasi and the communist Socialist Unity Party (SED) published. This led to the depiction of the institution as being a willing collaborator with the authorities in general and the Stasi in particular. Frequently it was the Protestant church's self-description of being a 'Church within Socialism' that was the target of attacks.

In the ensuing years, however, the debate has lost some of its polemical tone, opening the possibility of a more detached consideration of the role of the Protestant churches in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This volume, though destined for specialists rather than the general reader, is a welcome addition to the literature, concentrating, as it does, on one of the GDR's regional Protestant churches, or *Landeskirchen*. All too infrequently have accounts of church-state relations in the GDR focussed on individual *Landeskirchen*, each having its own specific regional, theological and confessional characteristics.

This book is concerned with the Evangelical Church of the Church Province of Saxony (*Evangelische Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen*, or KPS) whose headquarters are in Magdeburg and whose territory extended 440 kilometres along the border between East and West Germany. It contains an annotated collection of the reports from the church leadership to the KPS synod from 1946 to 1989. «Reports of a church's governing body are usually texts that are as dry as dust,» Harald Schultze, a church historian and former KPS official who edited this collection, rightly notes in his introduction. Yet in this case they are also a rich source for anyone undertaking academic research into communist rule in East Germany. The first report is dated 22 October 1946. It was the first synod of the KPS after the Second World War, when the church was still coming to terms with the experience of National Socialism and seeking to rebuild, in many cases literally, from the rubble left by the war. The last report is dated 3 November 1989, less than a month after the demonstrations that shook the ruling communists, but before the opening of the Berlin Wall

six days later that would sweep away the GDR and pave the way to German unification. Between the two dates of 1946 and 1989, the reports treat issues such as relations with the Russian occupying forces; the formal division of Germany into two separate states; the open harassment of churches in the early 1950s, and the at times more subtle discrimination that followed; the consequences of the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the introduction of compulsory military service; the formation of an independent Protestant church federation in East Germany and its attempts to reach a *modus vivendi* with East Germany's communist rulers; the self-immolation of Oskar Brüsewitz – a pastor belonging to the KPS – in what he said was a protest against the atheistic state; and the growth of a church-based peace, ecology, third world and human rights movement that culminated in the 1989 'peaceful revolution'.

Many other issues touched on in the reports could spark off further research: how pastors in the immediate post-WW2 years were asked to become town or village mayors (prefiguring a similar development after the events of 1989); the fate of the parish churches in the restricted area next to the border between East and West Germany; or the problems Christians faced when they wanted to place Bible verses in death notices in the newspapers.

One striking development charted in this work is the involvement of the KPS in the worldwide ecumenical movement, particularly after the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva, which marked a turning point. One of those who played a role as a go-between was Heino Falcke, a KPS pastor who became Provost of Erfurt, and was a member of the WCC's working group on church and society. Another was Bishop Werner Krusche, who as a member of the presidium of the Conference of European Churches worked for the 1975 Helsinki agreement which helped to facilitate human contacts between Eastern and Western Europe. Such ecumenical relations stimulated what can be seen as the KPS's specific approach to church-state relations in the GDR, summarised by Falcke in his explicit hope for a 'socialism that can be changed for the better'.

For the Stasi, however, such sentiments were a reflection of the fact that the KPS had become a seeding ground for what it called 'politically-negative' forces that were developing an 'intellectual platform and a vanguard for counter-revolutionary activities', based around non-violent resistance to the political and ideological infrastructure of the GDR.

One of the key instruments in the 1980s for such non-violent resistance was the WCC's process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC), and this volume helps to trace the links between the KPS and the WCC in the elaboration of this endeavour. Heino Falcke played a major role at the WCC's Vancouver assembly in the encouragement of this conciliar process; the KPS, in turn, would become the first of the GDR *Landeskirchen* to give its official support to the undertaking, which became a catalyst for transforming the GDR's latent disaffection into the open dissent that would come to the fore in 1989.

This volume also highlights another aspect of 'being church' that played a significant role in what has been called the GDR's 'Protestant revolution': the nurturing by the Protestant synods of a democratic culture of decision-making in a society otherwise dominated by Marxist-Leninist centralism. There were few other places in the GDR where decisions were arrived at through open debate and leaders elected by secret ballot. Not surprisingly, the Stasi expended an enormous amount of effort on attempting to control the synods, precisely because the outcome of their deliberations could not be predicted in advance. Just as significantly, the synods provided a training ground in the day-to-day exercise of parliamentary procedure. After 1989, when the GDR was suddenly confronted with the need to change its legislative procedures from a politics of acclamation to a place of more genuine debate, it was often those schooled in the synods who were most able to deal with the new challenges – people such as Reinhard Höppner, moderator of the KPS synod from 1980 to 1994, who became vice-president of the GDR's parliament after the free elections of March 1990, and later state premier of Saxony-Anhalt. Finally the volume includes 47 pages of biogra-

phical data about the main people mentioned in the text which would be a useful reference also for those who research interests transcend the KPS.

The editor and publishers of this volume are to be congratulated for making this source material available to a wider circle of researchers.

Stephen Brown is managing editor of Ecumenical News International and is undertaking research on the churches in the GDR at the Centre for East German Studies at the University of Reading, UK.

Simone Morandini, Teologia ed ecologia, Novecento teologico 17, Morcelliana, Brescia 2005

To what extent does the Jewish-Christian tradition bear responsibility for today's ecological crisis? To what extent is it true that the anthropocentrism of Christianity, especially in the west, has contributed to reckless exploitation of the planet since the beginning of the industrial era? In his study on the relationship between Christian theology and ecology, Morandini offers a rapid overview of the gradual evolution undergone by theological approaches of the Christian churches during the last four decades. The Biblical witness is unequivocal. It speaks of creation as a communion of creatures. But it must be admitted that the notion of creation as a whole has not consistently been affirmed in the course of church history. Attention has been unduly concentrated on the vocation and role of human beings, especially in the churches of the west. Theology was therefore not prepared for an immediate response to the ecological crisis. The theological discourse of the 1960s was fundamentally anthropocentric. Neither the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) nor the Conference on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches (1966) showed any awareness of the ecological threats humanity was to face. New horizons only opened in the early seventies.

The process of change occurred differently in the various confessional traditions. The Orthodox Churches, in particular the

Ecumenical Patriarchate, in harmony with the witness of the fathers of the early Church, rapidly developed a clear theological stance on environmental issues. In many Protestant churches, first timidly, but gradually with more and more conviction, an ecological awakening took place. The World Council of Churches became, as Morandini rightly points out, "a laboratory" of theological reflection on the meaning of God's creation (p.43), and numerous theologians produced new perspectives on the relationship between human beings and the whole of creation. The evolution was slower in the Roman Catholic Church. In my view Morandini underestimates the weight of the fact that the Second Vatican Council not only neglected the theme of our responsibility towards Creation (p.19) but formulated orientations pointing in exactly the opposite direction. If Lynn White had been in need of a proof for his thesis, he could have quoted §12 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*: "Believers and non-believers are in general agreement that *everything on earth* is ordered toward man, the summit and central point of creation." How could Roman Catholic theologians depart from this authoritative teaching? It is not astonishing that theological debates again and again got caught in fruitless discussions on the unique role of human beings in the whole of creation. Morandini gives an interesting summary (p.198ff) of recent Roman Catholic statements on environmental issues. It shows how important the 'laboratory of the ecumenical movement' was also for the Roman Catholic Church. Several of the statements quoted in this section are in fact ecumenical" statements. The joint declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Pope (the Venice statement) and the *Charta oecumenica* are good examples. The environmental network of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) was founded in reaction to the foundation of the ecumenical European Environmental Network (ECEN).

But Morandini's study is not limited to an overview of the theological thinking of other authors. In the second half of the book he offers his own views. He places primary emphasis on the bodily character of creation

(p.163ff). The body is by no means of secondary significance; the body is not a fetter from which we have to be freed. God creates, nourishes and sustains us as bodily beings. God's affirmation of the body finds its highest expression in the Incarnation. If God makes the body God's own, the dimension which connects us with the whole of creation, how could we not be obliged to care for the tissue of the whole creation? But Incarnation goes further. God also makes the body disfigured by sin God's own. Both the body of humans and the body of the whole of creation in their suffering and groaning are destined to reach communion with God. Jesus bears on the cross what violence destroys. The mutilated body of creation

will be restored. It is not by chance that bread and wine, fruits of the earth, are in the centre of the liturgical life of the Church, and not by chance either that the kingdom of God is often compared to a festive meal.

This study by Simone Morandini is a precious and most welcome contribution to the slow process of change in theological thinking regarding the relationship between human beings and the whole of creation. He is not satisfied with a mere defence of traditional positions but seeks to read the signs of the time in a more constructive and promising way than have many authors in the past.

Lukas Vischer is a former director of WCC Faith and Order.

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Index Volume 57 2005

Themes of Issues

January: Ecumenical Formation

April: Building Communities of Peace:
An Asian Contribution

July: Transformative Grace: Reflections on
the Ninth Assembly Theme

October: Reflections on Kuala Lumpur & An
Ecumenical Miscellany

Articles

A Bride, a Groom, a Rabbi and Two Priests:
Recalling an Inter-religious Wedding in
Belgium, by Rabbi Moshe Weiss, 4:446.

An Experience of the Faith and Order Plenary
Commission, by Hrangthan Chhungi,
4:389.

An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy
in Korean Church History, by Jeong-Min
Suh, 4:451.

The Assembly Theme: A Patristic Approach,
by Leandro Bosch, 3:298.

Be Careful What You Pray For, by Simon
Oxley, 3:292.

Becoming What we Pray: Three Images,
three Lives, by Michael Plekon, 4:395.

Building Communities of Peace for All,
by Valson Thampu, 2:147.

Building Communities of Peace: Asian
contributions, by Oscar S. Suarez, 2:136.

The Challenge of Building Communities of
Peace for All: the Richness and Dilemma
of Diversities, by S. Wesley Ariarajah,
2:124.

Challenged to Open Our Eyes to Bear
Witness, by Walter Kasper, 3:278.

The Circle of Concerned African Women
Theologians: Its Contribution to
Ecumenical Formation, by Isabel Apawo
Phiri, 1:34.

Culture, Identity and Church Unity, by Joseph
Ratzinger, 3:358.

Economy of water: a spiritual basis for an
alternative economy, by Park Seong-Won,
2:171.

Ecumenical Education and Formation: a Latin
American Perspective, by German
Zijlstra, 1:59.

World Council of Churches



- Ecumenical formation in Bossey: The Holistic and Inclusive Model of Academic Study and Research, Life in Community and Shared Spirituality, by Ioan Sauca, 1:66.
- The Ecumenical Movement and the Transmission of the Word of God in Vatican II's Dei Verbum, by Patrick Mullins, 4:406.
- Effervescent Diversity: Religions and Churches in Brazil Today, by Gerd Uwe Kliewer, 3:314.
- Epistemic Objectives for Ecumenical Formation: a Catholic Perspective, by Gosbert T.M. Byamungu, 1:50.
- European Christianity and the Challenge of Militant Secularism, by Hilarion Alfeyev, 1:82.
- Formation of an Ecumenical Consciousness, by Phyllis Anderson, 1:3.
- Forming a Movement: Origins and Opportunities, by Simon Oxley, 1:19.
- God's Grace and Human Dignity, by Elsa Tamez, 3:276.
- God's Grace: A New Beginning in the Midst of the Scars of History, by Margot Kaessmann, 3:286.
- Harare to Porto Alegre - and Beyond?, by Kersten Storch, 3:294.
- Labouring for God's Transformation, by Naim Ateek, 3:288.
- Learning to Live in Oikoumene: Doing Ecumenical Formation in Asia, by Hope S. Antone, 1:27.
- 'Listening to the voice of God': new trends in the ecumenical movement, by Samuel Kobia, 2:195.
- Living ecumenically: an absolute necessity: reflections from academic experience, by Elsa Tamez, 1:12.
- Looking to Porto Alegre, by Keith Clements, 3:306.
- Nation-building in South Africa: Has Progress Been Made?, by J.M. Vorster, 4:473.
- Non Scholae, Sed Vitae Discimus: Eastern European Perspectives on Ecumenical Theological and Religious Education, by Vladimir Fedorov, 1:42.
- Partnership in Transformation, by Valson Thampu, 3:284.
- Peace-building for Women and Children in Asia, by Hope S. Antone, 2:179.
- Prayer of Transformation, by WCC Geneva interns, 2005-2006, 3:275.
- Praying for God's Transformation in Africa, by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 3:281.
- Radical Ecumenism, or Receiving One Another in Kuala Lumpur, by Chris K. Huebner, 4:372.
- Sheer Numbers do not Tell the Entire Story: The Challenges of the Korean Missionary Movement from an Ecumenical Perspective, by Sangkeun Kim, 4:463.
- Some Reflections on Faith and Order following Kuala Lumpur, by John Hind, 4:382.
- The "Teaching of Contempt" and Ecumenical Publications, by Amy-Jill Levine, 4:433.
- Trust and Convivência: Contributions to a Hermeneutics of Trust in Communal Interaction, by Rudolf von Sinner, 3:322.
- Visions and Movements of Indigenous Peoples for a New Community, by Victoria Tauli Corpuz, 2:185.
- The ways of God's Grace, by Naamah Kelman, 3:290.
- Worship, Prayers and Poverty, by B.J. de Klerk, 3:342.
- Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God's Body in an Age of Environmental Violence, by Aruna Gnanadason, 2:159.

Authors

- Alfeyev, Hilarion: European Christianity and the Challenge of Militant Secularism, 1:82.
- Anderson, Phyllis: Formation of an Ecumenical Consciousness, 1:3.
- Antone, Hope S.: Learning to Live in Oikoumene: Doing Ecumenical Formation in Asia, 1:27.
- Antone, Hope S.: Peace-building for Women and Children in Asia, 2:179.
- Ariarajah, S. Wesley: The Challenge of Building Communities of Peace for All: The Richness and Dilemma of Diversities, 2:124.
- Ateek, Naim: Labouring for God's Transformation, 3:288.
- Bosch, Leandro: The Assembly Theme: A Patristic Approach, 3:298.

- Byamungu, Gosbert T.M.: Epistemic Objectives for Ecumenical Formation: a Catholic Perspective, 1:50.
- Chhungi, Hrangthan: An Experience of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission, 4:389.
- Clements, Keith: Looking to Porto Alegre, 3:306.
- Corpuz, Victoria Tauli: Visions and Movements of Indigenous Peoples for a New Community, 2:185.
- de Klerk, B.J.: Worship, Prayers and Poverty, 3:342.
- Fedorov, Vladimir: Non Scholae, Sed Vitae Discimus: Eastern European Perspectives on Ecumenical Theological and Religious Education, 1:42.
- Gnanadason, Aruna: Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God's Body in an Age of Environmental Violence, 2:159.
- Hind, John: Some Reflections on Faith and Order following Kuala Lumpur, 4:382.
- Huebner, Chris K.: Radical Ecumenism, or Receiving One Another in Kuala Lumpur, 4:372.
- Kaessmann, Margot: God's Grace: A New Beginning in the Midst of the Scars of History, 3:286.
- Kasper, Walter: Challenged to Open Our Eyes to Bear Witness, 3:278.
- Kelman, Naamah: The Ways of God's Grace, 3:290.
- Kim, Sangkeun: Sheer Numbers do not Tell the Entire Story: The Challenges of the Korean Missionary Movement from an Ecumenical Perspective, 4:463.
- Kliwer, Gerd Uwe: Effervescent diversity: Religions and Churches in Brazil Today, 3:314.
- Kobia, Samuel: 'Listening to the voice of God': New Trends in the Ecumenical Movement, 2:195.
- Levine, Amy-Jill: The "Teaching of Contempt" and Ecumenical Publications, 4:433.
- Mullins, Patrick: The Ecumenical Movement and the Transmission of the Word of God in Vatican II's Dei Verbum, 4:406.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba: Praying for God's Transformation in Africa, 3:281.
- Oxley, Simon: Be Careful What You Pray For, 3:292.
- Oxley, Simon: Forming a Movement: Origins and Opportunities, 1:19.
- Park, Seong-Won: Economy of Water: A Spiritual Basis for an Alternative Economy, 2:171.
- Phiri, Isabel Apawo: The circle of Concerned African Women Theologians: Its Contribution to Ecumenical Formation, 1:34.
- Plekon, Michael: Becoming What we Pray: Three Images, three Lives, 4:395.
- Ratzinger, Joseph: Culture, Identity and Church Unity, 3:358.
- Sauca, Ioan: Ecumenical formation in Bossey: The Holistic and Inclusive Model of Academic Study and Research, Life in Community and Shared Spirituality, 1:66.
- Sinner, Rudolf von: Trust and Convivência: Contributions to a Hermeneutics of Trust in Communal Interaction, 3:322.
- Storch, Kersten: Harare to Porto Alegre - and Beyond?, 3:294.
- Suarez, Oscar S.: Building Communities of Peace: Asian Contributions, 2:136.
- Suh, Jeong-Min: An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy in Korean Church History, 4:451.
- Tamez, Elsa: God's Grace and Human Dignity, 3:276.
- Tamez, Elsa: Living Ecumenically: an Absolute Necessity: Reflections from Academic Experience, 1:12.
- Thampu, Valson: Building Communities of Peace for All, 2:147.
- Thampu, Valson: Partnership in Transformation, 3:284.
- Vorster, J.M.: Nation-building in South Africa: Has Progress Been Made?, 4:473.
- WCC Geneva interns, 2005-2006: Prayer of Transformation, 3:275.
- Weiss, Rabbi Moshe: A Bride, a Groom, a Rabbi and Two Priests: Recalling an Inter-religious Wedding in Belgium 4:446.
- Zijlstra, German: Ecumenical Education and Formation: a Latin American perspective, 1:59.

Editorials

January: Simon Oxley

April: Deenabandhu Manchala

July: Theodore A. Gill, Jr.

October: Theodore A. Gill, Jr.

Chronicle

Benediction in a time of crisis, 1:92.

Documents and presentations from the event marking the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC

Reflections on the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (1965-2005), 4:492.

Towards the renewal of ecumenism in the 21st century, Samuel Kobia, 4:494.

From reflection to reception: Challenges facing the Roman Catholic Church-WCC collaboration, Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, 4:498.

The ecumenical movement in the 21st century - a contribution from the PCPCU, Cardinal Walter Kasper, 4:505.

Ecumenism in the 21st century': Final statement from the consultation 30 November-3 December 2004, 1:92.

Obituaries, 2:205.

Report of the inter-orthodox pre-assembly meeting, 1:101.

WCC Central Committee, 15-22 February 2005

Report of the Moderator: Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, 2:208.

Report of the general secretary, 2:225.

Statements on public issues, 2:245.

Book reviews

Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I, by John Chryssavgis ed., 3:366.

Educacao para um Novo Contrato Social, by Danilo R. Streck, 3:361.

For All Peoples and All Nations: Christian Churches and Human Rights, by John Nurser, 3:364.

Forgiveness in International Politics; an Alternative Road to Peace, by W. Bole, D. Christiansen, R.T. Hennemeyer, 2:268.

Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition, by Christopher J. Ellis, 2:267.

La conversion de las iglesias, una necesidad y una urgencia de la fe: La experiencia del Groupe des Dombes como desarrollo, by Jorge Alejandro Scampini, OP, 1:112.

Liturgical Renewal as a Way to Christian Unity, by James F. Puglisi (ed.), 4:517.

Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History, by Björn Rymann with Aila Lauha, Gunnar Heiene, Peter Lodberg, 4:522.

Science, Theology and Ethics, by Ted Peters, 1:114.

Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling, by Pamela Cooper-White, 4:518.

The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, by Philip Sheldrake (ed.), 4:520.

The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology, by Amos Yong, 4:516.

Reviewers

Andinach, Pablo R., 1:112.

Berry, Jan, 4:518.

Crow, Paul A., Jr., 3:366.

Epps, Dwain, 3:364.

Gosling, David, 1:114.

Heller, Dagmar, 4:517.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti, 4:516.

Kerber, Guillermo, 2:268.

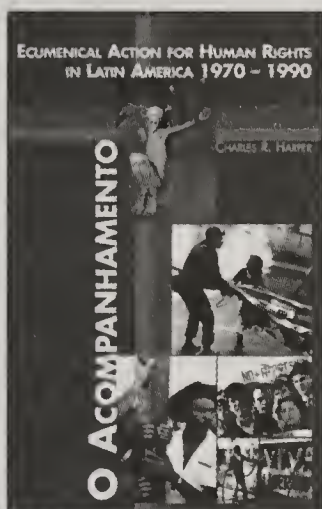
Longchar, A. Wati, 4:520.

Mateus, Odair Pedroso, 3:361.

Rüppell, Gert, 4:522.

Stevenson, Kenneth, 2:267.

O ACOMPANHAMENTO: ECUMENICAL ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA 1970-1990



Charles R. Harper

In the 1960s and early 1970s military dictatorships and juntas replaced elected civilian governments across Latin America. This book relates stories of Christians and their churches as they engaged in the struggle to uphold human rights, including the most basic human right to life itself.

The book is a testament of courage and hope in face of the humiliation, torture and murder or “disappearance” of dissidents. It tells of ordinary men and women who stood up for justice and righteousness in unexpected ways. It shows how the region’s churches, and Christians throughout the world acting through the World Council of Churches, provided the oppressed people of Latin America practical “accompaniment” (*o acompanhamento*, in the Portuguese of Brazil). The narrative aims at strengthening common memory of the churches’ part in Latin America’s recovery of human rights, especially among a younger generation that may be unaware of this chapter in ecumenical history.

The author: *Charles R. Harper* served from 1973 to 1992 as executive director of the World Council of Churches’ human rights resources office for Latin America, and from 1992 to 1995 as interim director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

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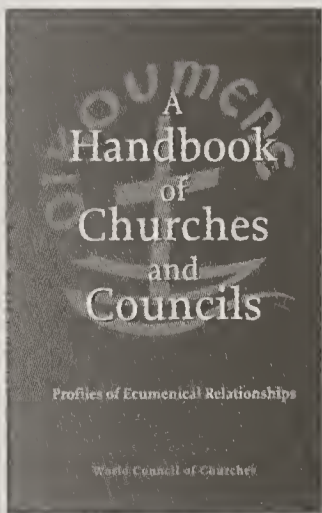
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A WCC Publication



A HANDBOOK OF CHURCHES AND COUNCILS PROFILES OF ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS



Huibert van Beek, compiler

It has often been said – and rightly so – that the World Council of Churches is first and foremost a fellowship of churches. This book is a vivid illustration of that reality. The descriptions, lists, statistical data and other information presented in these pages give a striking picture of the extent and diversity of this fellowship. It encompasses a Christian population of some 590 million people, in close to 150 countries in all regions of the world, comprised of over 520,000 local congregations served by some 493,000 pastors and priests, as well as countless elders, teachers, members of parish councils and others.

A Handbook of Churches and Councils is not simply a handbook of the member churches of the World Council of Churches. At all levels – global, regional and sub-regional, national and local – member churches of the WCC interact with other churches which, for various reasons, are not formally part of the Council's membership. By combining in one volume all the conciliar and confessional bodies and their membership, this book demonstrates concretely the reach of the ecumenical movement and also shows how much broader it is than the WCC alone. It serves to remind us that ownership of the movement rests not only with the WCC but with all the partners, and ultimately with God.

This volume has been compiled by *Huibert van Beek*, a former staff member of the WCC. In the 1980s he carried responsibility for the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources programme. From 1992 until his retirement in 2004, he was programme executive for Church and Ecumenical Relations.

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